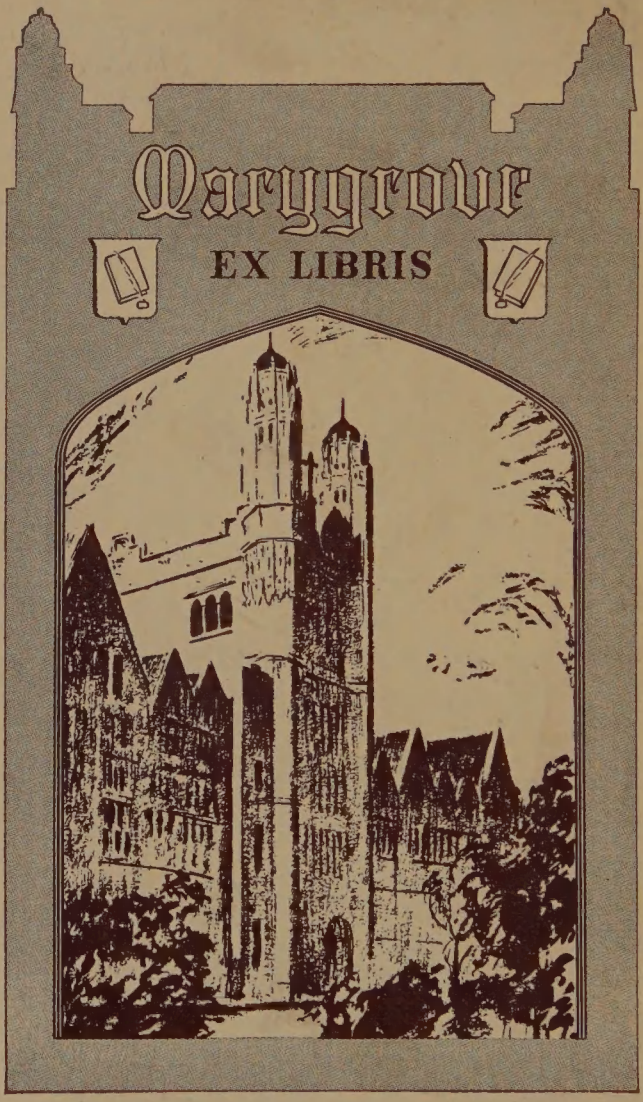
MY FAIR LADY

LOUIS HÉMON



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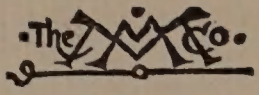
MY FAIR LADY



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MY FAIR LADY

BY

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MY FAIR LADY

MY FAIR LADY

THEY looked at each other across the little round table of the café, smiling with exaggerated cordiality; and, in spite of the old familiar forms of speech into which they had fallen, without reflection, in the first surprise of their meeting, they really found nothing to say.

His hands on his knees, opened to make room for his paunch, Thibault repeated vaguely:

"Good old Raquet! What do you think of that! How small the world is!"

Raquet, shrivelled up on his chair, his legs crossed, his back bent, replied wearily:

"Yes . . . yes . . . Fifteen years since we've seen each other, eh? Fifteen years! That's a long time!"

And when they had said so much, they turned away with a common accord,

and watched the people passing on the pavement.

Thibault thought: "There's a chap who looks as if he doesn't have a square meal every day!"

Raquet furtively regarded the prosperous mien of his former comrade, and an involuntary expression of bitterness wrinkled his thin face.

The boulevard was still glistening with rain, but the clouds scattered little by little, revealing the pale evening sky. Beyond the dusk which deepened between the buildings, the eye could almost follow the course of the light which withdrew into the sky, fleeing, fleeing desperately, the sad surface of the earth.

Separated by the little marble table, the two men continued to exchange vague exclamations.

"Good old Raquet! Good old Thibault!"

And they glanced away.

Now night had come and, in the warm light of the café, they talked without

embarrassment, almost with animation. They fished up in their memories, one after another, all those whom they had known in the past, and each common recollection brought them a little closer, as if they were growing young again together.

"So-and-so? Settled somewhere . . . tradesman . . . official. . . . That other fellow? Married money; big fortune; lives with his wife's family in Touraine. . . . Little What-do-you-call-her? Married too; don't quite know to whom. . . . Her brother? Disappeared. Never been heard of . . ."

"And the little Marcheval . . ." said Thibault. You surely remember the little Marcheval . . . Liette . . . whom we used to find when we came back for vacation. She's dead; you knew?"

"I heard," said Raquet, and they fell silent.

The rattle of saucers on the marble tops of the tables, the voices, the footsteps, the confused noises of the boulevard—they no longer heard any of these

things; and they no longer saw each other. A memory had swept everything away; one of those memories so real, so poignant, that you stretch yourself when you emerge from it, as from a dream. The memory of a great garden, of a lawn girdled with trees, bathed with sunlight, where children played . . . On this lawn there were sometimes many children, a whole host of children, boys and girls, and, at other times, there were two or three only. But Liette, little Liette, was always there. The days when Liette was not there, had never been worth remembering. . . .

Thibault dusted his knee with a mechanical gesture:

"It was a fine estate the Marchevals had," he said. "They always arrived from Paris on July 13, and they did not leave until October. You saw them in Paris, it is true! But we country fellows had them scarcely three months a year.

"Everything is sold now, and it is so changed you would scarcely know it any

longer. When Liette died, you see, it was all turned upside down. It is possible you never saw her after her marriage, since she went to live in the Midi. She had changed very quickly, though she was still pretty, and the last time she came yonder . . ."

"No!" exclaimed Raquet, with an abrupt gesture. "I . . . I'd rather not know."

Under the astonished look of his old comrade, his pale face took a purplish tinge.

"It's always the same thing," he said. "The women you used to know as children or girls, and come across later, married, with children of their own, perhaps, are quite changed, naturally. I wouldn't have cared about another, but Liette, . . . I never saw her again, and I'd rather not know."

Thibault continued to look at him and, on his heavy face, the astonished air disappeared little by little, giving place to another expression, almost pathetic.

"Yes!" he said in a low voice. "It's

true Liette was not like the others! There was something . . ."

The two men remained silent, absorbed in their memories.

That garden! . . . The gray stone house; the tall trees beyond and, between the two, the lawn with its long grass, never cut, where you chased grasshoppers! And the sunlight! There was always sunlight those days. Children arrived by the path which skirted the house, or else descended the steps, one by one, prudently, but with eager haste, and ran towards the lawn as fast as they could. Once there, nothing further was forbidden. You were in a fairy realm, protected on every side by walls, trees, all sorts of benevolent powers you felt about you, and there were cries and races—a drunken saraband in honor of liberty and of the sunlight. Then Liette stopped and said, with a serious air:

"Now, we're going to play!"

Liette . . . She wore a great straw hat which shadowed her eyes, and when you spoke to her, to say some of those

childish things which are so extraordinarily important, you came quite close to her and bent a trifle down and forward to get a good look at her face deep in this shade. When, all of a sudden, she became grave, you stopped short and approached to take her hand, in order to make sure she was not angry; and, when she laughed, she had the somewhat gentle, mysterious air of a fairy preparing happy surprises.

You played all sorts of splendid games, with princesses and queens, and that princess or that queen was naturally Liette. She had come to accept the title always offered her, without further demurring; but she surrounded herself with a prodigious number of ladies-in-waiting, whom she overwhelmed with unheard-of favours, for fear they might be jealous. At other times she gently forced the boys to play "girls' games," singing and dancing games, which they despised. As they went round and round, holding each others' hands, they were at first sullen and mocking. But, as they

looked at Liette standing in the center of the ring, her little white face shaded by the great straw hat, her eyes softly shining, her young lips shaping the old words of the song like so many tender kisses, little by little they stopped making fun, and sang too, without ceasing to look at her:

"We shall go no more to the woods,
The laurels are cut,
My fair lady . . ."

They had separated and they had grown old, many among them never having seen each other again. But those who met many years later, had only to pronounce one name in order to recall in common the dead years and their poignant perfume of youth, to see again the little girl with tender eyes who held her court between the house and the tall, somber trees, on the lawn marbled with sunlight.

Thibault sighed and murmured, as if speaking to himself:

"The human heart is surely a strange machine! Here am I, married, father of a family, and all the rest! Well! When I think of that little girl, and of the time when we were young together, it brings back suddenly all the silly things one thinks of at sixteen: noble sentiments, big words, such stories as you find in books. All that doesn't mean a thing; but, just to think of her is like seeing her, and then all those ideas come back into one's head, just as if they were things which counted!"

He stopped an instant, and looked curiously at his comrade.

"And you!" he said. "You who must have seen her more than I. I'd wager you were a little in love with her once?"

Raquet remained bending over the table, his elbows on his knees, and regarding the bottom of his glass. After some moments of silence, he replied softly:

"I'm neither married nor father of a family, and I've never forgotten all the things which haunt one at sixteen, and which sensible men forget afterwards.

"Yes, I was in love with Liette, as you say. I don't mind its being known now. What no one will ever know, is all that meant for me, and still means. I loved her when she was only a little girl, and our parents must have known it and laughed at it. I loved her when she grew up and I was a young man; but no one knew anything about it. And how I still loved her, after that, through all these years, until her death and after her death—if I tried to tell this, people would never understand it at all.

"Childish love is only a jest, and a young man's romantic love counts for hardly more. An ordinary man passes through it, suffers a little and ages a little, then ends by smiling at it and enters for good into life. But there are certain men who are not quite like the others, and who go no further. For these, the little love-affairs of childhood and youth never become the kind of things people laugh at; they are images which remain incrusted in their lives like saints in their niches, like statues of saints, painted with

tender colors, towards which one returns later, when one has followed all the rest of the great sad wall, without finding anything.

"I had always loved Liette from afar, timidly, shyly. When she married and went away, nothing, all told, was changed for me. My life was only just beginning. It was a hard life. I had to struggle and make my way, so that I had little time for memories. Then I was still very young, and I expected all sorts of marvelous things from the future . . . Years passed . . . I learned of her death . . . Still more years, and then one day I learned that the things I used to expect would never arrive; that the best I could hope for was a succession of other years, all alike, sad and hard; a long dull battle, without glory, without joy, without anything noble or sweet, with just enough to eat, and that I had left in the strife all the youth there was in me, almost all the life.

"I felt I should never love again, I had nothing left but a poor heart, on a scale

with my life, which kept closing a little more each day. The noble sentiments, the big words, as you say—all those things which so many men let die without a regret—I felt escape me also, and that was the most terrible of all. I remembered what I had been, what I had desired, what I had believed, and the thought that all that was finished, and that soon I should, perhaps, be unable even to remember it any longer, was like a first hideous death, long before the second. I felt I should never love again.

"Then it was that the memory of Liette returned to me; of Liette when she was little, with her great straw hat shadowing her eyes; with her ways like those of a tender sovereign, playing with us on the lawn; of Liette a woman grown, full of soft grace, and keeping something or other which showed that she had never lost her childish heart. And I said to myself that I had loved at least once, and for a long time, and that, as long as I could recall that, I should have something left.

"She belonged to me as much as to anyone else in the world, since she was dead! And I turned back, I retraced the road of other days and collected all the memories which were already fleeting, all my memories of her—a thousand little things which would make most people laugh if I spoke of them—and I review them every evening, when I am alone, for fear of forgetting anything. I remember almost every gesture and every word of hers, the touch of her hand, of her hair flung by the wind across my face; that time when we exchanged a long look; that other day when we were alone and when we told each other stories; her presence close to me, and the mysterious sound of her little voice.

"I come home at evening; I sit at my table, my head between my hands; I repeat her name five or six times, and she comes . . . Sometimes it is the grown girl I see, her face, her eyes, her way of saying 'Good evening,' in a very low voice, slowly, with a smile, holding out her

hands . . . Other times it is the little girl, the one who played with us in that garden; the one who gave us a presentiment of life as a sunny, magnificent thing, a soft and gorgeous fairy-land, because she belonged to that world, and because she held our hands in the games . . .

"But, little girl or big girl, as soon as she comes, all is changed. With her memory, I recover all the quivering excitement of old, the august burning borne in the heart, that great soul-hunger which makes one live ardently, and all the ridiculous, touching little weaknesses which become precious also. The years vanish, the scales fall; it is my palpitating youth which returns—all the warm life of the heart which begins again.

"Sometimes it is slow in coming, and a great fear seizes me. I say: it is finished! I am too old; my life has been too ugly and too hard, and I have nothing left. I can still remember her, but I shall see her no more . . .

"Then I take my head in my hands, I

close my eyes, and I sing to myself the words of the old song:

"We shall go no more to the woods,
The laurels are cut,
My fair lady . . ."

"How the others would laugh if they heard me! But my fair lady hears me, and does not laugh. She hears me and emerges from the magic past, with my youth in her little hands."

HE-WHO-SEES-THE-GODS

THERE will be no one tonight, Timmy," said Father Flanagan, with a sigh; and he went back to his place at the shop-window, peering out into the street through the ground-glass.

Two hundred yards away the electric trams passed incessantly, stopping a few seconds and then, clanging their gongs, starting off again towards Aldgate or Poplar. At the corner of West India Dock Road, the broad straight avenue along which the tracks extended, widened into a square surrounded by several international "Sailors' Homes," a hotel, and a public-house which displayed, in immense letters, its name effulgent with splendour and mystery, "The Star of the East." But the street-cars and, indeed, every other symbol of a frenzied civilization, recovered its exact

sense and its true importance, when viewed from the corner of Limehouse Causeway—from the precise point indicated by the freshly painted front of a shop. It was a tiny shop, almost a stall; but the new lettering across it stood out like a declaration of faith, and it seemed to turn with indifference from the bright, wide streets where progress passed with its upstart clamour, to open on the narrow alley where wiser races had sought refuge.

The new sign consisted of a single word: "Dispensary"; but in the show-window hung a more ambitious placard which read: "Several languages spoken here, and all men understood."

This assertion, blazoned as it was on the outskirts of London's Asiatic quarter, might have seemed boastful; and yet it but feebly expressed the boundless goodwill of its authors. Every evening they waited there, behind the ground-glass, for some one to come and ask them for what they had to give; and every evening they lamented having been asked so little. One was disconsolate at seeing his store

of bandages and remedies, assembled with love, scarcely diminish in the too perfect order which bespoke its uselessness; the other, because the too infrequent patients were all infidels who, hardened in the error of their ways, came, suspicious and hostile, to have their bodies cared for, but jealously steeled against the voice of the true God their souls headed for the abyss.

On the pavement opposite, a group of Chinese sailors were smoking indolently, their narrow eyes wandering over everything in this corner of a barbarous town which had ceased to astonish them. Long ago they had learned what was good to take in this strange civilization; and, contemptuously, mockingly, they watched the white barbarians about them avidly grasping at things which they, the yellow men, judged good to leave.

Father Flanagan contemplated them through the window with a sort of melancholy covetousness. Certain of these, or others like them, would probably enter his dispensary sooner or later. They

would come to have a dressing made or to ask for medicine, with many marks of respect and of gratitude. They would listen willingly enough to his advice and accept some of his tracts, tucking them away deferentially, before his eyes, in an inner pocket of their jackets; and they would depart, with reiterated thanks and an inscrutable smile, never to come again.

The care his nephew gave them, the magic philtres he put up for them, without charge, in little bottles, were among the things they considered good; but the care which he, Father Flanagan, would gladly have given their souls, the salutary formulas he sought to teach them, were, it seemed, good only to leave. And they allowed themselves to be exhorted, in vain, with all the indulgent patience, all the disdainful wisdom, politely dissimulated, of a race which had grown weary of believing before other races had invented their creeds.

"There will be no one tonight, Timmy," repeated Father Flanagan, and he sighed again. His nephew rose in his turn,

glanced around the room to make sure that everything was ready should anyone chance to come, opened the cabinet for the tenth time to inspect its contents, then he too took his stand, his hands behind his back, before the window, and gazed out upon the street with a discouraged air.

When the generous philanthropists whose money maintained this combined crusade of hygiene and Catholic faith, asked them for an accounting, how would it be possible to make them understand that so many efforts should have produced such meager results? A few Norwegian sailors— Protestants, naturally — who, when Father Flanagan insinuated, with infinite tact, that the oldest of Christian religions might, after all, be the best, fled abruptly, trailing after them their unfinished bandages! Some Wapping Irishmen—Catholics, these—who came, with repeated professions of faith, to be treated for vague maladies, and ended by begging the wherewithal to go and drink to the "ould counthry!" And

a handful of Asiatics who, proudly proclaiming an earlier conversion, stood aghast at learning that they had abandoned the faith of their fathers for another which was not the true one! A wretched balance-sheet which might well have discouraged less robust a faith!

For the third time Father Flanagan sadly repeated: "There'll be no one tonight, Timmy," and glued his forehead to the pane to see farther along Limehouse Causeway, where numberless infidels were preparing to sleep in peace, full of a lamentable confidence in the efficacy of their idols. In every one of the seventeen Chinese lodging-houses behind the walls of Wang-Ho's restaurant and Chong-Chu's shop, and in Pennyfields, on the other side of West India Dock Road, there was scarcely a building that did not serve as a refuge for several sons of the Middle Empire. During the day, when they wearied of seeking a ship in the neighboring docks, they loafed along the streets, played with the gutter urchins, or paid court to some white beauty; but

now that night had come, they put, one by one, a wall between themselves and the barbarians, in order to recover the atmosphere of the sacred soil, and its profound peace.

Father Flanagan's eyes followed the vague forms moving about in the darkness of the street. From time to time a door opened, casting a pale gleam on the wall opposite, then closed again. Every time one of these spots of light made a rent in the darkness, momentarily sketching a silhouette that was instantly effaced, he knew that one more unbeliever was escaping him, for that night at least, and he sighed sadly.

The sound of the door opening made him turn sharply; and when he saw it was a woman who had entered, he stepped forward with his most welcoming smile, while his nephew settled himself at his table.

They gave the visitor a chair and, while the priest strove to set her at ease with words of kindly greeting, the doctor noted the wounded hand and gently

unwound the stained bandages about it. When he had examined the sore, he said gently, as if to a child:

"It's nothing but an abscess, a little abscess. I'll have to hurt you a bit, but it won't take long."

While he was lancing the swelling, Father Flanagan stood beside him, handing him bandages and vials and, as he smiled encouragingly at the patient, tried to guess who she was, and where she came from. Neither a Malay nor a Hindu, but too dark for a Levantine . . . Her black, oiled hair, fine, with no trace of kinkiness, was hidden under a shawl that covered her shoulders and the upper part of her body, falling low on her fringed skirt, and her beaded and spangled slippers seemed to have left in the London mud all the sparkle and glitter of their early days. Yet she had none of the beast-of-burden look peculiar to certain women of the Orient. Under her sordid clothing, she even retained a certain easy grace of bearing and movement, and all the crushing oppression of a grim

city, so harsh to the poor, had been unable to kill the expression of her warm eyes and of her ingenuous smile, or the naïve vanity of a woman conscious of her body's price.

When the sore finger had been treated and dressed, Father Flanagan himself poured her a glass of cordial, invited her to draw near the fire, and talked with her as a friend. She understood English very well, but spoke it haltingly, and once or twice employed words which he asked her to repeat. Timmy, who was putting away his instruments, exclaimed suddenly: "Why, it's French!" and she nodded vigorously.

Proudly she explained that she had been taught by the missionaries—had, indeed, been their best pupil. Her name? Taoufa. Catholic? Why, of course! Roman Catholic. And she had learned to sew, to read and to sing in the choir; in short, everything that a woman should learn to become the equal of her white sisters, to be desired by young men, and finally to gain Paradise—the real Para-

dise, of the saints and the angels—she had learned with the greatest diligence in the island of her birth, somewhere between Samoa and the Marquesas . . .

His hands on his knees, Father Flanagan leaned towards her with an enchanted air and, in a lower tone, asked:

"I hope you haven't neglected the practice of your religion since you left your country?"

She confessed, quite simply, that she had, a little; because, in spite of herself, she couldn't somehow believe that the God yonder was really the God who was needed here, where everything was so different . . . And then she didn't know where to go . . . She knew no one who could continue to teach her . . .

Father Flanagan took one of her hands in his and explained to her, very gently, half as a confessor, half as a friend, that she had done very wrong, that she had endangered her salvation and that, clearly, it was the hand of God which had, that evening, led her to him . . . The very next day she must come back to see

him, and everything would promptly be set right.

She had listened to him with respect, and even a little fear. To comfort her, he questioned her about the island where she was born. Was it a pleasant, fertile island, where life was good? Her only answer was to heave a deep, ecstatic sigh, while her hands made a vague gesture of tenderness; and, when she tried to describe the blessed island, she was forced to stop at every word, hesitating, to repeat this gesture which sought to express so many things!

In truth, the island was fair and sweet, the pearl of the Pacific, a marvel which the Lord kept jealously, almost secretly, in a corner of the world, for his chosen children alone! There were deep forests, heavy with perfumes, and paths traced in these forests, like defiles; two springs; a hilltop whence, on all sides, could be seen the blue ocean lashing itself into foam, the coral girdle, and the lagoon, smooth as a leaf, where the fishing pirogas passed. There were also long

beaches peopled with rose-colored crabs and swept by soft breezes, and these beaches descended, in a gentle slope, from the shade of the mango-trees down to the transparent water where fish of every hue darted to and fro. And the women singing in the woods! And the bridal processions which sang also as they passed, waving palms and flowers! And the baths in the warm sea, whence one emerged laughing to dry one's self in the sun and to weave garlands of purple flowers which seemed to find new life in the black hair, washed and anointed with oil!

Yes, the father had read books about such lands, though not about the marvelous island. The fathers yonder, when they had wished to describe the delights of Paradise, had said that it would be an immense island, like her own, but still more beautiful, where there would be neither typhoons nor death. And surely the anguish of the damned, dreaming of Paradise, could be no more terrible than the sadness of those who dreamed of

their island, in the cold, muddy streets, between the high gray houses, under a sky heavy with rain!

The fire smoked and smouldered. Between the coals spurted tongues of flame and each, before it died, cast a warmer glow on the fine brown skin, on the liquid, coffee-colored eyes which rested now on the bandaged hand, now on the sad reality about her, with the same pathetic expression. Through the glass in the door, the group of Chinese sailors could be seen, motionless and almost silent, around a street lamp, shivering but stoical, under the upturned collars of their thin jackets. Now and then the distant, muffled clang of the tram gongs sounded, then silence again, broken another time by the shrill laugh of an Asiatic, or the shuffle of sandals in the street. Taoufa gazed at the bandage on her hand and dreamed of her island. Her ragged shawl had fallen back, uncovering her hair which shone in the gas-light. To warm her feet, she thrust her slippers, covered with tarnished

spangles, towards the fire, and sadly watched the little flickering flames spring up and die, like burning regrets.

At a glance from his uncle, Timmy got up, walked indifferently to the door and stood there drumming a march on the pane as he looked out. Father Flanagan leaned towards Taoufa and asked her, very gently:

"And . . . what are you doing here, my child?"

She looked at him with an astonished air and shook her head. He hesitated a trifle, and changed the form of his question.

"Who are you with here, my child?"

She explained, without a trace of embarrassment, that she was with two men of her race, whom she could not leave because they needed her. One was sick, the other very old. But some day, a little later, they would return together. If one of them died, those who were left would return just the same.

Who were these men? One was very

old, and full of wisdom—her grandfather, perhaps, though she was not very sure of it. She pronounced the name that was his yonder, and it was long and sonorous, like the verse of a canticle. And the other? The other was her husband.

Father Flanagan asked again in a low voice:

"Was it a priest yonder who married you?"

She shook her head without a word. It seemed to her quite natural, evidently, that he should question her thus. She had nothing to reproach herself with. Her bearing and the serene expression of her eyes indicated a clear conscience; but she seemed to fear that, like the fathers yonder, he might view certain things as incomprehensible. Yet, when he insisted, she explained to him that she had been married, as was fitting, by a priest, and with all the proper ceremonies, but that her husband had not been kind to her, and that she had left him. She had left him for this man, who was kind

to her, and who loved her. Only, he was going to die.

The priest's hands rose in a gesture which, even before he spoke, bore witness to the blackness of the sin she had committed. So not all the teachings of the fathers yonder, and the privilege of having been admitted to the faith, and the promises of eternal joys distributed by the ministers of the Lord, and their threats of unending punishments, had been able to protect her! More fortunate than so many others, she had been saved by powerful intercessors and, guiltier than they, she had fallen back into the slime of sin. The bonds forged by the white fathers could not be dissolved. They lasted as long as life—longer even—and to break them was to pass about one's neck, and the neck of one's accomplice, the fetters of the damned!

Taoufa answered, shaking her head, that, if there was any sin in it, the sin wouldn't last very long, because her present husband was going to die. If he had not been near death, they would

have returned together to the island, and they would have been happy.

Father Flanagan straightened up and became severe. Invoking an authority equal to that of the fathers who had instructed her in the Christian religion, he told her the way in which she lived was a grave and terrible state of sin; that each look from the man who said he loved her was not what it seemed to be, but an insult and a stain, and that each day she tolerated this stain was a new crime against the goodness of the Lord and the majesty of the Church. Taoufa merely looked at the fire, and again shook her head.

She drew her shawl more closely about her shoulders, and her eyes betrayed a childlike distress. A hard land, this, without pity, as without sunlight, where one had to give up everything to purchase problematic happiness which would come, for her at least, only much later! She held the corners of her shawl in her uninjured hand and cowered beneath the divine threats, fearful and yet hostile, as

if she would have defended, against all, something precious, to which she had a right.

When the priest repeated sternly: "It is a terrible sin!" she raised her eyes and replied in a clear voice, as if but one word were needed to exculpate her:

"He said that I must not listen to the white fathers, and that it was not a sin, because we loved each other so greatly."

She said again, with a sort of warm devotion, the name she had pronounecd before, and looked at Father Flanagan with an air of innocent triumph.

"Who said that?" he asked.

For the third time she pronounced the name, adding:

"That old man—he is very old, and he has seen many things . . ."

Father Flanagan repeated the syllables one by one, and asked:

"What does that name mean?"

This time she hesitated a little, sought her words, and ended by translating slowly, with several pauses:

"He . . . who sees . . . the gods . . .

He said it was not a sin because we loved each other so greatly!"

Timmy drummed on the window, and pretended not to hear. In the street, periods of silence alternated with the distant brawling of a drunken sailor and the soft shuffle of sandals on the pavement. In the little room of the dispensary, the gas was burning bravely, as if ambitious also to do its bit of good, attracting by its light, from afar, some shivering Oriental, and giving him a feeble illusion of warmth and sunshine. And, near the fire, from which little still-born flames continued to spring, Father Flanagan carried on a strange combat against the powers of evil, for the possession of the still pagan soul of Taoufa.

She wrapped herself closely in her shawl, jealously and fearfully clutching its corners in her hands, as if to protect herself against all the cold things which surrounded her: the fog, the damp, dreary wind, the frozen ooze of the streets, and these pitiless laws one sought to impose upon her. Sometimes she bent over,

drawing her shoulders together, placing her bandaged hand conspicuously upon her breast, raising eyes full of childish distress and supplication towards the priest. Sometimes she simply stared at the fire and obstinately shook her head; or else she assumed an air of assurance, almost of defiance, and invoked an authority so lofty that it cast a kind of protecting shadow over all that she, Taoufa, might do, holding in check even the solemn orders of the white father.,

He-Who-Sees-the-Gods had said that it was not wrong, because they loved each other so greatly! When she had repeated this, she seemed to believe herself absolved in advance, and received the reproaches with the air of a martyr. He-Who-Sees-the Gods was so old that there was no one on the island who could remember having seen him young, and so full of wisdom that no one would have dared to consult him without obeying him afterwards. It was long, long since he had ceased to work and walk like other men; and, when he was still on the island, he

remained seated all day beside the stone monuments raised by the heroes and gods of old, whom he saw and whose voices he heard. When his advice was asked, he waited before answering until the gods had come to his call and enlightened him with a supernatural wisdom; and those who consulted him stood at a distance, troubled and struck with fright, while the invisible powers assembled about him and spoke to him through miraculous, awesome signs. And when, at last, he let his counsels be heard, they were so just and so wise that, clearly, it was the voices of the immortals which dictated them.

Even here, in the heart of the sunless lands, over which, it would seem, morose gods must rule, he remained all day sunk in mysterious contemplation, and nothing could disturb his peace.

When the fathers yonder had attempted to speak to him of their God, he had answered them that this God had never been among those who came to hold counsel with him; and even the most

docile of the white fathers' pupils, and the most faithful believers in the new religion, had agreed that the white God must be too young for a man so prodigiously old, and that it was better to leave him in peace among the gods of his youth, who had long since left the earth . . .

Father Flanagan listened, his eyes never leaving the brown face lighted by reflections from the dancing flames, and he was saddened to see so clearly that she had become again an idolatrous little savage, and that perhaps, at bottom, she had never been anything else. The pious teachings and the efforts of devoted missionaries, the lessons unwearyingly repeated to a ring of big, simple-hearted children yonder, on the margin of the world—all this had been as quickly effaced as the water which the sun drew in fine mist from moist locks, after the bath, on long beaches scurried over by rose-colored crabs, and without leaving any more trace. God's commandments and the Church's weighed for nothing in

the scales because, on the other side, an idolatrous old man had let fall a sort of savage absolution.

"If He-Who-Sees-the-Gods is still a pagan," he said suddenly, "there is only just time for him to learn to know the truth, and to hear the true God spoken of, before being called to confront him. Where do you live, Taoufa?"

Taoufa turned on him the rapid glance of a tracked animal, and hid her face in her shawl. When he repeated his question, she replied in a terrified voice:

"We live in Pennyfields, Father, in the house next to the shop of Yum-Tut-Wah; but you must not come! The two men who are there . . . . you must leave them in peace! There is my present husband, who is going to die soon because the cold has crept into his chest . . . and he says that if I were not with him . . . I whom he loves so greatly—the cold would creep into his very heart, and his blood would stop flowing . . . And He-Who-Sees-the-Gods, Father . . . he is so old! . . . If you tell him that his gods are

not the true gods, surely he will die also!"

Her look of frantic supplication wavered under the priest's eyes. In a firm voice he replied:

"It is better to die of having seen the truth, Taoufa, than to live in error. Didn't the fathers yonder teach you that, or have you forgotten everything? I am going to see He-Who-Sees-the-Gods this very night, to show him the true God, before it is too late!"

Taoufa had gone and Father Flanagan took his greatcoat down from the hook to follow her. Into one of his pockets he put a crucifix, some pious leaflets, a colored engraving showing negroes, Polynesians and Asiatics kneeling at the feet of the Saviour. Then, having done so, he addressed his nephew who had remained near the door, his forehead pressed against the pane, saying:

"A little savage, Timmy! That's what she's stayed, a little savage, who would have to be converted over again every day! And that other savage who's with her—the young one—will be better off

at the hospital, if he's sick, much better! Won't he, Timmy?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Timmy answered slowly, and remained dreaming.

"Yet," continued the priest, "these brown folk are easier to influence than the yellow. They're barbarians, if you like, but tender-hearted barbarians . . . They can be reached, appealing to their senses first, by showing them Him who died for them, as for us, and by telling them about His death in such a way as to make them understand how greatly He loved them.

"A father once told me that he had arrived in a Pacific island where no missionary had ever been seen, and that, the very first day, he had gathered them about him, and told them, through an interpreter, and as simply as a story, the life and death of Christ, and the torments he had suffered for love of us. Before he had finished, all the women were weeping and crying, asking if He were really dead; and when he showed them the crucifix, and told them it was His image, one of

them begged him, with tears, to take Him down, at length, from his cruel cross, and let him rest on their mats.

"And that, Timmy, is why we are called, far more than the Protestants, to speak to these people and touch their hearts. They can only expound to them laboriously a colorless, verbal faith, while we place ceaselessly before their very eyes the effigy of Him they must adore; and when they see on His face, and in the wounds of His body, what he suffered for them, they always come to love Him, like savages, perhaps, but to love Him. And those people know how to love!"

As he was leaving, he stopped short and said:

"It just occurs to me, Timmy—that man who's sick—perhaps it would be better for you to come, too."

Timmy nodded without replying, took his bag, and went out with him.

As they crossed West India Dock Road, Father Flanagan repeated to himself aloud:

"In Pennyfields, the house next to Yum-Tut-Wah's shop . . . A woman who is only a child, a dying man, and a hallucinated old idolator, hailing all three from the South Seas, God knows why and how! London's a queer place, Timmy! . . . *He-Who-Sees-the-Gods* . . . Poor heretics! There's only just time; but at least he will have seen the true God before he dies!"

When they knocked at the door of the house next to Yum-Tut-Wah's shop, there was a sound of steps in the hall and on the stairs, then a silence, and Taoufa came to open for them. She said nothing, but looked at them with great, terrified eyes, and led the way up the stairs..

On the landing, a half-open door was slammed noisily, raising a heavy puff of pungent, blue smoke, and Taoufa opened another door.

They entered a very small room, bare and stifling, where the fire which burned must, for weeks, have been accumulating

poisonous gases. The furniture seemed to consist of ragged mats, rugs worn to the warp, and a little tin trunk which served as a table. From a pallet which had been drawn into the middle of the room, close to the fire-place, a young man, little more than a skeleton, watched them with burning eyes. On another pallet, a very old man, squatting, had his back turned to them.

Father Flanagan said in a loud voice:

"Tell them who I am, Taoufa, and why I have come."

Taoufa shook her head without answering, then pointed to the squatting old man, and murmured:

"He-Who-Sees-the-Gods!"

The priest continued:

"Tell him I have come to show him the true God, Taoufa!"

He placed his hand on the crucifix in the pocket of his greatcoat, and took a step forward; but Timmy stopped him short with a gesture, and shook his head. Then the priest, too, looked, leaning over, and knew not what to say.

For He-Who-Sees-the-Gods was blind; and whether the vision he bore within him showed him the stone gods of his island, or the fiery gods he had forged in his own heart, he would never have any other vision, he would never see the god of ivory.

THE LAST EVENING

THEY had met at the corner of Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Road, and were now waiting for Sal, both standing motionless on the pavement.

Bill turned his back on the roadway. His hands in his pockets, his cap tilted, he watched the passers-by and whistled. Tom faced the street and stared with dull eyes at the shops opposite, without seeing them. He, too, had his hands thrust into his pockets. His head starting forward, his back bent, he seemed to be following something which drifted away, without understanding it. His yellowish hair, well greased and carefully smoothed, emerged from his cap in a regular fringe on his forehead, and in glistening curls on his temples. On his chest floated the ends of a cherry-colored scarf, escaping from his waistcoat; his yellow shoes, broken in several places, but

shiny across the toes, overhung the muddy water in the gutter. From time to time he straightened up and squared his shoulders with a mechanical gesture, throwing his head back and compressing his lips; then, little by little, he relapsed into his depressed attitude.

Bill turned, spat into the gutter and asked, with an important air:

"When are you going to join your regiment, Tom?"

Tom answered without looking at him, his eyes fixed:

"Day after tomorrow . . . The sergeant said they didn't want anything to do with us tomorrow, Thursday, because everybody would still be under the weather after Boxing Day . . ."

Bill paid homage to this sagacity with a nod.

"Chaps who know their business, those sergeants," he said. "Better make the best of the last evening you can have a good time without going to the guardhouse afterwards, eh?"

Tom, too, spat to express his ineffable

bitterness, and said nothing further. Turning on his heel, Bill addressed a conquering wink to two little girls, acquaintances of his, who passed, arm-in-arm, dragging velvet skirts in the mud, and singing a doleful love-song; then he whistled the air, made a face at them as they turned around, and said suddenly:

"There's Sal!"

Tom sighed and turned to see Sal approach.

She arrived with a mincing gait, her arms swinging, her head waggling under a gigantic black-plumed hat. When she saw that Tom and Bill were looking at her, she stopped and saluted them with a sweeping gesture and a sharp "Ha, ha!" after which she threw back her head till the great feathers of her hat caressed her waist; then, her arms graciously outstretched, her body swaying, she advanced executing a langorous step.

When she stood before them, she ended her dance with a skip, stopped, and, extending one arm dramatically towards Tom, she demanded:

"Well, Tom! It's done?"

Tom nodded "yes." She laughed stridently, gave a sudden toss of her head, which made her feathers dance, and cried:

"So they've taken him! Must have been short of men!" . . "Oh, Tom! My handsome Tom! How I should have loved to see you in your red coat!"

Tom looked at her, open-mouthed, and kept looking at her. Already, for a long time, he had cherished an obscure conviction that, in all the world, there existed no one who could be compared to Sal. Now he was sure of it; and seeing her thus, in her finest array, decked out for this holiday—their last day—was as if a troop of nameless things awoke within him, and began to kick, to thrust and to bite . . .

She had very red lips in a very white face, had Sal, and very light blue eyes with very black lashes, so that her scarlet mouth was all the more striking in the midst of this touching pallor, and so that her eyes, to which the somber

lashes, as distinct as though painted, gave a hard, almost savage expression, surprised you all the more when you looked at them and saw that they were the eyes of a little child.

Her dress was of violet, with golden bands across the bodice, and a belt with a golden buckle; over her dress she wore a long cloak of embroidered black velvet; around her neck she had a five-stranded pearl necklace, and a second necklace with numerous pendants which hung on her breast; from each ear swung, at the end of a gold wire, a big pale blue stone. Thus clad and thus adorned, she naturally assumed a slightly haughty, hieratic air, partly for the sake of the effect, and partly in honor of the holiday; but when her eyes rested on Tom and on Bill, and she spoke to them, they had no trouble in recognizing their Sal of everyday.

And Tom continued to gaze at her, sighing heavily, his eyes lost in longing, and his look drank in the splendour of the golden bands on the violet of her dress, the sparkle of her jewels, the

proud grace of the long black cloak, and the poignant appeal of the little white face, of the red mouth, of the ingenuous, timid eyes . . .

Yet Bill was the first to express his admiration.

"Oh, Sal!" he said. "How fine you look this evening!"

Sal replied: "Ah, go on!" with a modest little smile, turned completely round on her heel, making the skirts of the velvet cloak fly, and looked at them both with a mocking air.

Tom heaved a heavy sigh and said:

"Come, let's have a glass!"

It was an offer which required no answer, so they went, all three, to the corner "pub." There they succeeded in finding a seat for Sal, brought her two fingers of gin in a slender, very distinguished goblet, and she drank with little sips while, standing beside her, they gulped their beer.

They were alone in this corner, and the sudden intimacy, or perhaps the fraternal libations, caused the careless mask which

Sal had worn until then, to fall. She raised her eyes and asked, in a hesitating voice:

"So . . . it's tomorrow, then, you leave, Tom?"

Tom replied:

"No! Not till the day after."

All three fell silent a moment, then Bill spoke up suddenly:

"After all, it's me that's most to be pitied in all this, you know. Sal's going into service; it's no great fun, perhaps, but it doesn't prevent that she's going to be in clover, well fed and so on, just enough work not to get bored, and all the customers a-courting her! And there's Tom, who's off to be a soldier, see the world and all the rest! But the poor devil who stays in the corner, after all his pals have flew the coop, what about him, eh?"

Tom looked at Sal, who listened, head raised and thrown back, her moist lips shining on the enamel of her teeth, her chin outlined against the high pearl necklace with its soft sheen, and against the sparkling pendants; then he lowered

his eyes and looked down at his shoes, without a word. It was Sal who replied in a low, drawling voice which hesitated a little:

"Its no fun for anyone, Bill. We were so happy, all three of us together . . . now there's Tom going away, and I'm going too . . . and what's going to happen to us?"

Again all three fell silent, because they had been taught only just enough words to express their every-day thoughts, and because they had no speech to tell their dull heart-break, the heavy resentment which the force of things inspired in them, the harshness of the lot which separated them.

The winter was cruel in Bethnal Green. It had brought even more misery than preceding winters, and the charity subscriptions, the aid funds, the government donations—so large, so magnificent in the newspaper columns—had melted without leaving a trace in the midst of all this dispossessed population. Tom, long out of work, had lived by vague makeshifts,

half-day jobs in the markets or in the warehouses—infinitesimal sums, chance gleanings of the street; and now, since November, the factory where Sal worked had shut down. It is true that she had a home, where she almost always had enough to eat, and that she knew where to sleep; but her step-father had quickly grown tired of feeding her and had passed, without transition, from reproaches to blows; work remained unfindable, winter advanced, harder each week. After days spent in the icy mud out of doors, in fruitless search, she had to return to the hostile abode and eat her supper hastily on a corner of the table, her eyes open for probable acts of violence, before her mother who, hidden in a corner, saw everything, without daring to say a word, fearful for the child about to come!

When she had been offered a place in a Yarmouth restaurant, she had well understood that she could not say "no"; and besides, her step-father, on being consulted, had promptly accepted for her; but she knew what awaited her. It was

an evil place, where she was going. The owner, a big, black, crinkly-haired man, had already had "trouble" with his servants; he had generally come out of it all right, but the servants had not always been so successful. When Tom had learned this, and when he had seen the man—the cousin of a shop-keeper in Brick Lane—he had gone without a word to the nearest recruiting-station, where he had taken the King's shilling.

This had happened on Christmas Eve; and now, two days afterwards, they had met for this last holiday evening. The next morning Sal was going away, mocking and brave; while, twenty-four hours later, Tom was leaving in his turn, for seven years, to serve his Majesty the King and Emperor, beyond the seas. Both knew all this: what forced them to leave, and what awaited them; but now, at the last moment, they discovered that it was a far greater misfortune than they had imagined.

Tom—perhaps he was thinking of it—groaned dully and started listlessly

towards the bar; but, half-way, he changed his mind and returned, out of politeness, to wait until Sal had finished. She thanked him, holding out her glass with a gracious smile, and said, very gently:

"The same, Tom, if you please!"

Bill looked at them both, one after the other, held out his glass also, and glanced down at the floor.

This time Tom and Bill had gin in their beer, and they began to feel that it was, after all, a holiday, whatever the morrow might bring.

"What sort of Christmas did you have, Sal?" Bill demanded.

Sal turned her head indifferently, and replied with a drawl:

"Oh, not so bad . . . Except that the old boy began by breaking plates over my head when I wanted a second helping of pudding; but he calmed down when I took the poker . . . He said to me, just so: 'All right! All right, little girl! Go ahead! In your new place you'll get broken in!"

"I'd jolly well like to square accounts with that bloke before going away!"

"And let mother and the kids starve," said Sal. "Yes, that would be smart!"

They said no more till it was Bill's turn to pay his round. The bar was now filled with the voices and laughter of drinkers. Near them a group were jostling each other facetiously. Bill contemplated their gaiety with a superior air.

"That doesn't come up to our last Whitsuntide, eh, Tom?" he remarked. "Lord! What a day we had of it!"

Tom nodded and Sal looked up at the ceiling with a smile of introspective ecstasy. That Whitsuntide a well-to-do friend had taken them to Wanstead Flats in his cart, and there they had had one of those glorious days whose tender memory had made many hard years pass without a complaint. The great turquoise sky, the swings, the ardent conquest of the cocoanuts, the innumerable bottles of ginger beer drunk on the grass, and the long siesta, flat on their backs,

in full sunlight, hand in hand, a blade of grass in each mouth! And the snack of smoked sausage, of shellfish eaten standing about the little carts heaped with almonds and candy! The numerous pilgrimages to the neighboring "pub," where they drank without reckoning! And, above all, the return in the twilight, the six of them piled into the little cart, whose axles gave and ground, drawn by the tiny pony, miraculously strong and willing, who understood that it was a holiday, and trotted madly; the return in the night under a sky still tender in the west, all intertwined, heads shaking on shoulders, hats exchanged, singing, at the top of their lungs, a delirious, sorrowful love-song! Before and behind them were similar carts, all full of entwining couples, witless, heavy-headed, drunk with poor men's drink and a poor men's joy, pressing closely against each other and howling into the night, for fear of remembering the coming morrow. And the glory of the cool breeze raised by the mad trot, the wild jolts and the swayings, the hug

with which one clings confidently to a waist, as if to the sole thing of which one is sure, and for an evening only!

They remembered that, all three of them, but without sadness, because, as long as one drinks, nothing seems irreparable. And then the great hall with its high ceiling, warm, well lighted; the close-packed, noisy crowd; the incessant clinking of glasses and of coins on the bar; the view of the compartments opposite which people entered each instant with animated, jovial air, certain at least of several minutes of fun and enjoyment—all this contributed to remind them that they were enjoying themselves, that they were spending their holiday evening befittingly, clad in their best clothes, and drinking together.

But when they left the bar for the street, the shock of the night upset them a trifle, and Sal, always brave, began to sing.

She sang:

"A lovely picture in a lovely golden frame . . ."

and Bill's voice joined hers. Tom sang

a verse with them from time to time, or else a word or two only, and then stopped. They walked in the middle of the street, Sal with a hand on a shoulder of each of the boys, and abandoning herself to the two arms which surrounded her waist. Her head thrown back and swaying a little at each step under the great, black-plumed hat, she seemed plunged in a sort of sacred ecstasy, and raised heaven-wards her nasally entoned lament, like a solemn incantation. So often had they strode thus along Bethnal Green Road, all three, holding each other by the neck and waist, and singing at the top of their voices! So often had they raised towards the impassive gods the offering of their harmonies: love-songs, sad or tender, all chanted in unison, at the top of cracked voices, religiously, without stopping or faltering, and here, at last, was what fate had sent them!

The street was very wide, and the houses were very low, so that they might have thought themselves on a vast open plain, alone between the earth and

the overwhelming sky. This sky was strewn with very low clouds, curiously patterned, like stage clouds, so near that they emphasized still further the enormous depth which separated them from the vault powdered with stars; and they marched from one end of this vault to the other in solemn file, keeping their stately formation, as if conscious of the festal evening.

Under this sumptuous ceiling, the houses of Bethnal Green, the sparse, poorly lighted shops, even the crowded public-houses with flaming fronts, seemed disproportionately small and petty, and the folk who peopled this street, the couples singing on the roadway, the groups assembled near the doors, the bands passing on the pavement, all holding each other round the waist, to the shrill sounds of a mouth-organ, were clearly pitiful, misshapen beings, apparently struck with madness and blindly celebrating a barbarous cult.

Sal sang with all her might, in a nasal voice, without inflections, and the two

boys sometimes sang with her and sometimes stopped to listen to her. The strophes of her ballad celebrated, one after the other, the astounding splendours of

"the lovely picture in a lovely golden frame"

a glorious vision, merely to speak of which inundated the whole poor, counterfeited world with superior distinction. She sang as one recites a prayer, eyes fixed, head thrown back; and, on each side of her wan little face, the great blue stones suspended from her ears swayed softly. She had made herself beautiful for this last night, had Sal; and now she sang her loveliest ballad, in such wise that, if the morrow which separated them, should bring them ill luck and long sadness, it would be the morrow which was to blame!

Tom had ceased singing. Suddenly he stopped short and said, choking:

"Oh, let's drink, what do you say! It's already getting late!"

The public-house which they entered was crowded to the doors, and Bill had to push and edge his way through the groups to reach the bar. In each vio-

lently lighted hall, on coming out of the darkness, Sal appeared giddy, and staggered. She steadied herself with a hand on the wall, and looked at Tom with a stupid smile.

"Oh, Tom!" she said, "It's really true we're both going away? Bill and you, and then me, we were so happy together, but especially you, Tom, especially you. . . . What's going to happen to us? . . . And all we've forgotten to say to each other!"

Tom also looked at her an instant, before turning away, his hands plunged into his pockets, panting like a frightened beast. Then Bill arrived with the glasses. They drank together, several times, and little by little the soft warmth, the pleasant taste of the drinks, and the uproar in which they shared, shed over them once more a very soft drowsiness.

A holiday evening! It was a holiday evening, and they had to have a good time. All those who filled this bar enjoyed themselves bravely, drinking, laughing, and jostling each other, or else touch-

ing glasses with solemn politeness. Tom looked about him mechanically, and suddenly the idea came to him, for the first time, that certain of them were gay like himself, in appearance, and, at bottom, frightened, deadened by some incomprehensible distress . . . This man standing in a corner, tall, strong, tanned—a fine, massive, wholesome type—who held himself quite straight, his neck stiff, and drank alone, with an air of dearly purchased wisdom . . . These two broken little old men, emaciated, almost in rags, who seemed to be telling each other antiquated stories, and showed drooling gums when they laughed . . . And this girl, scarcely a woman, pregnant, alone with another woman, older than she, to whom she listened, turning her glass round and round between her fingers . . .

But when he looked at Sal again, he understood that all the grievances of others were as nothing compared with his own. It was tomorrow she was leaving! . . . and the face of the man she was going to serve! . . . There had never

been anyone like Sal: the distinguished elegance of her dress, the display of her pearls and precious stones, her air of sharp assurance, which seemed heroic, because of her pathetic fragility! He looked at the clock, and saw that time was galloping madly. Then he hastened to carry his glass to his lips, perceived that it was empty, and felt confusedly that it was a bad sign.

When they went out, he took Sal by the waist, masterfully, almost brutally, and pressed her against him. She yielded without a word. Bill hesitated, then thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked beside them. They went thus as far as Cambridge Road, and stopped in the middle of the street, undecided, not knowing what to do. But now, from a neighboring public-house, came a guttural sound of banjo and voice, which attracted them. Three black-face artists, drawn up near the door, strummed their instruments and sang negro songs which told of long, deserted rivers in the heart of a fairy continent, of happy plantations,

of black idylls under the tropic sun. The white of their eyes and of their teeth, the red of their lips, spotted the sooty faces; they wagged their heads, shivering slightly in the cold, as real, exiled negroes would have shivered, and a picturesque melancholy filled their refrains from far-off countries, sounded in the vibrations of the plucked strings and in their metallic voices.

Sal leaned more heavily on Tom's arm and listened to the music with a ravished smile. The marvellous foreign landscapes which swept by in their ballads, the loves of sentimental Africans and tender, faithful quadroon girls, which nothing very serious hindered—all this transported her to a delicious world of plays, of songs and of books—the world where everything is set to music, and where everything ends well. The sharp clang of the banjos had for her the sweetness of celestial harps, and the worn, nasal voices of the black-faced minstrels carried her away with one bound towards blissful regions.

Tom, looking up suddenly, saw the

clock through the window of the "pub," and jumped.

"Quick!" he said, "It's going to close! We've only just time for a glass!"

They hastened to enter, and drank hurriedly. Bill still had money, and offered a second round. The drinkers were just beginning to leave; the waiter, his eye on the clock, was getting ready to expel the lingerers before the fatal hour sounded. Tom leaned towards Sal, a great fear in his eyes, and mumbled:

"Hurry, Sal, hurry! Another . . ."

And Sal, quickly tossing off the contents of her glass, held it out for more.

Several moments later, ejected, they found themselves outside, and this time the night closed down on them like a catastrophe. All evening they had passed from the street into a bar, again into the street, and then into still another bar. They had drunk and sung and done all that had occurred to them to celebrate fittingly the holiday and their departure; but this time their exit into the dark had about it something definitive, irremedi-

able. They could no longer do anything. Fate already carried them along, and the refuges closed behind them. Tom again clung to Sal's waist, and Bill followed them stumbling. Amid the dispersing groups, they went along Bethnal Green Road, as far as the corner of a somber little street, and sat down on the steps of a house.

Above them the white clouds continued to march in stately parade from one end of the heavens to the other. Sal, from the top of the steps, looked at them an instant, dull-eyed, then leaned her swaying head against the wall. Seated on the first step, Tom remained motionless, but his eyes wavered, riveting themselves, turn by turn, on the paving-stones, on the wall opposite him, on the people passing. He seemed to be trying to remember something — something important, which he had forgotten to say.

And Bill began to lament. He enumerated burning grievances, one after the other, in a thick voice. Turn by turn he accused Fate, malevolent third

persons, Sal herself, who had treated him badly.

"I've been your pal, too, Sal!" said he. "Just as much as Tom! And here you're going away, both of you. It's our last evening together, and there's nothing except for him! . . . I've been a good pal for you, Sal, just as much as Tom! . . . And it's me who's paid oftenest for the drinks!"

A group passed, some one made fun of his groaning voice, and he rose staggering, steadied himself with a hand on the wall, and suddenly rushed straight ahead of him, lunging wildly. There was a prolonged uproar, curses and cries, the dull thud of fists bruising the flesh of faces, confused encounters of drunken men, two combatants rolling together on the pavement, then separated with kicks and blows. Tom flung himself into the fray, reeling and ferocious, and Sal scratched something . . . and then, a little later, they found themselves alone, without quite knowing how, and the sol-

emn calm of the night enveloped them once more.

Drunk, Tom felt himself, little by little, growing numb, and struggled instinctively, as if abandonment would have been the end of everything. He looked at Sal, and each time he was seized with a new terror. Tomorrow morning she would leave . . . worse still, it was already long past midnight, and in several hours it would be day. In the midst of the stupor which descended upon him, he understood, however, a thing which had remained hidden until then: that, throughout the hard years—interminable years of misery, strewn with rare orgies—from one end of his man's life to the other, and from the top of his heart to the bottom, there had never been anything but Sal which counted. . . .

Seated on the highest step, she leaned her head against the wall. Her fine hat had toppled a bit in the fray, and a strand of hair hung down her ear as if to hide a bruise. Her eyes were half closed, her lips half open as she panted slightly; be-

yond the shadow of the doorway, the light of the neighboring lamp-post laid a terrible lividness upon her face. Tom continued to watch her with troubled eyes, and struggled to keep back a little longer the unconsciousness which he felt approaching, and also to try to understand, to see clearly this great, shapeless, urgent—atrociously urgent—thing which escaped him. Sal was going away—there you were! It was intolerable and nothing could be done about it. Perhaps there were things he might have done, or other things he might have said, and then all would have been different. But how to behave? In life, everything happened pell-mell, by chance, by accident, and nothing could ever be done. . . . Sal was going away and, when she had gone, nothing would be left. . . . Nothing would be left; the world would be empty, and he, Tom, would be empty too. . . . He would go away through the streets in his red tunic and, under his red tunic, there would no longer remain anything. . . . And she!

The wan little face leaning against the door-post was terribly motionless, calm and fixed, as if all her real life had left her, leaving only a mask of flesh—flesh that anyone could handle carelessly. The dark night became an accomplice, and suddenly a hideous shadow seemed to descend upon her livid face.

"Sal! Sal!"

Did he cry, or did he merely think he cried? Was it his voice, or was it but a howl from his drunken heart? Sal reopened her eyes, looked about her and said, in a somewhat thick voice, with a laugh:

"Look, Bill's sick!"

Bill was, in fact, leaning against the wall, his head between his arms, and vomiting, with heavy groans and with hiccoughs. Mechanically, Tom drew his hand across his face and, on the back of his hand, there was a red smear, which he regarded with a stupid air, because he did not understand where the blood came from. And Sal half sat up, steadying herself with one hand against the

wall, swayed two or three times, and began to sing once more:

"Beside the mill-stream I am dreaming, Nellie Dean . . ."

Then the long-suspended oblivion descended slowly upon Tom, like a shroud, and created a confused mirage of all that surrounded him. He no longer saw Sal, even—only the white spot of her face—and he scarcely heard the words she was singing. But he heard her voice, which was very sweet, yet which wrung his heart He no longer even remembered why.

"All the world seems sad and lonely, Nellie Dean,
For I love you and love you only, Nellie Dean.
I wonder if you love me yet, and if you sometimes regret
The happy days now past, Nellie Dean . . ."

Tom longed for a still deeper oblivion, which would efface everything, and which would last a long time; and he let himself fall backwards, the length of the step, from which he rolled to the pavement.

Sal had closed her eyes again, but continued to sing:

"I recall the day we parted, Nellie Dean . . ."

Bill hiccoughed against the wall.

THE OLD WOMAN

Let me fall asleep with the earth's sleep.

"THIS is the museum here?"

"Yes! Come in."

Grand-Grégoire hastily drew aside to let the strangers pass, and they crossed the threshold, one after the other, groping with their feet, lowering their heads, and grouped themselves anew in the dark interior.

"This way," said Grand-Grégoire.

Before a tiny window, through which penetrated a little gray light, had been placed a sort of crudely constructed glass case closely resembling a market-gardener's cold-frame. Grand-Grégoire wiped the glass with his sleeve; the visitors drew near and bent over, examining the incongruous objects arranged in it. There were two cannon-balls, a piece of bomb, several sabres, a helmet and two shakos, some pistols, a long flint-lock, and, in the

middle, spread out its full width, a frogged dolman pierced with two holes—the round one made by a bullet, the narrow slit by a sword-thrust—around which spread rust-colored stains.

"At your left," recited Grand-Grégoire, "a ball which had lodged in the wall of the house; you can still see the dent outside, above the door. The other ball was picked up on the battle-field, on the spot where the last square was formed. The bomb, too. The tunic belonged to a *chasseur de la garde*, who was killed charging the Austrian infantry; see the marks of the two wounds and the blood-stains; the curved sabre beside it belonged to him, too, and he still held it in his hand when he was picked up. The other sabre was the French general's."

He lied serenely, because his peasant shrewdness told him that these relics of the great battle, and the battle itself, were very old things, of which the living could know naught.

The visitors listened to the end, then talked together in low voices.

"Do you believe all that is authentic?"

A sceptic made an indulgent grimace. Another glanced about him.

"In any case, it's a very old house."

They seemed a trifle disappointed, but Grand-Grégoire did not care, because he had kept for the last the capital object of the museum, the living relic whose effect was certain.

"Perhaps you'd rather talk with the old woman," he said suddenly. "She's sitting there next the fire. Folks like mighty well to warm themselves at her age."

Good-naturedly he led them to the great high-backed arm-chair where the old woman had been installed in the morning, and where, for long hours, she had sat huddled up and seemed to want to slip to the floor, remaining seated, in short, merely because her stiff legs refused to bend and let her fall, and because her worn-out body no longer had any weight to speak of.

"Hey, Mother!"

He placed a hand on her shoulder and shook her a little, but not roughly, with

the precaution due a century-old organism which a miracle alone had kept alive.

"Here are some strangers who'd like to talk to you a little about the battle. . . . You recollect the big battle . . . and the Emperor . . . eh? You were there?"

The visitors had formed a half-circle before the old woman's arm-chair, and were regarding her with expressions of curiosity and compassion. A pleated bonnet mercifully hid her head, but the little that could be seen of her face indicated a touching age. There were deep hollows between the cheek-bones and the jaws; her white eyes ran with continual tears which rolled and clung to the thousand folds of her skin; for her face was no longer anything but a mass of wrinkles, like deep cuts. Precocious hard work, harassing poverty, maternity, and then a whole length of harsh and sordid life thereafter, had come, year after year, to corrode and to gash that thing which had been a woman's face, to make a heart-rending example of it. And what could be divined of her body, beneath the

shapeless clothes, was such as to make one ill even to think of.

"Hey, Mother!"

A last push woke in her a quiver of life, and suddenly she began to recite her lesson, without moving or turning her head, in a voice which trembled and faltered between her gums.

"Yes, yes . . . It's the solemn truth I was there, and I remember it right enough. . . . The cannon and the guns made a lot of noise, and the horses, too, running all together, and I tell you I was fair afraid. . . . There were men who were all torn to bits and who were tended here, and the cannon came nigh to destroying the house. It's true . . ."

"And the Emperor, mother? Don't forget the Emperor!"

"It's true I saw the Emperor, too. He passed behind the house with a lot of men on horseback, generals and I don't know what all. There, behind the house, he passed on the road, and I saw him as I see you . . . as I see you."

When she had reached this point, she

recalled the pantomime she had learned, and turned her outworn, unseeing eyes to the visitors, shaking her head.

"It's the truth . . . I saw him."

"How old is she, then?" asked a voice.

"A hundred and seven years," replied Grand-Grégoire, with assurance.

From the other corner of the hearth arose another quavering voice.

"A hundred and seven years, yes, that's right."

It was Aunt Ferdinand who spoke, and all eyes turned in her direction. Like the ancestress, she was seated in a straight-backed chair, on which her bent body slumped and swayed; her face was almost exactly like that of the other woman, marked with the same numberless deep wrinkles which seamed the yellow skin, and appeared almost as old; but, in her, life was still strong, and her sharp little eyes travelled and shone.

"I'm eighty-four, I am, and I'm her daughter! There now! One hundred and seven years, I tell you. That's her age!"

With exclamations of astonishment the

visitors had turned and were contemplating once more the survivor of the heroic epoch, the woman who had seen, with her own eyes, the great men and the great wars. They would have liked to ask her questions, but pity arrested them; they saw the pathetic ruin of her face, her dead eyes, the dry slit which had been her mouth; they divined the exhaustion of her meagre, sunken body, and were silent. Alone Grand-Grégoire spoke, and declared that the old woman was still solid, whatever one might think, and full of life; she was a little deaf, and no longer had the same eyes as when she was twenty; but she understood everything, and ate heartily.

"You wouldn't believe it to look at her, but she eats pretty near as much as I do. Oh! I tell you she's nowhere near dying! She's taken mighty good care of. . . ."

The disappointing poverty of the museum was forgotten; the visitors went towards the door, impressed, a little moved; silver coins issued from vest-pockets.

Grand-Grégoire accepted them with an awkward gesture, and followed the group as far as the threshold. Outside, one of the strangers turned, and looked at the hole which the cannon-ball had made in the wall; others stopped several moments by the side of the road—the road where, ninety-eight years ago, a little girl had watched the Emperor and his escort pass by. Then they moved slowly away.

Grand-Grégoire returned to the old woman and looked at her with a shade of uneasiness.

"She had a hard time waking up today!"

"Yes!" said Aunt Ferdinand. "It's worse every day, and when strangers come, she tells them a little less each time."

Silence filled the house. Outside, the wind whipped the vast, brown plain, the gray clouds flocked from one end of the gray sky to the other, and all the objects which stood out along the countryside—the black-roofed houses and granges, the trees stripped bare by the autumn and

brutalized by the wind—looked as if they were bored or suffering.

The badly seasoned logs smoked on the hearth; the old woman had sunk on her hard chair before the fire, and she was no longer conscious of anything but the fatigue which crushed her, and no longer had any other desire than that of death.

Some years earlier—fifteen or twenty, perhaps: what was that to her?—her great age inspired her with a sort of senile vanity, and she feared to die. But, since then, other years—too many of them—had come, and still others, and the whole mass had charged her with a burden such as a merciful god should never have imposed upon one of his creatures. The weight crushed her, gripped her old bones in their worn-out joints, turned her breath and her heart-beats into painful spasms whose cessation would, however, cause another intolerable pain; and what remained of her flesh had lost its life and ceased to be more than a cold, inert shroud which oppressed her.

She was seated in such a way that she

could not fall, yet it seemed to her that this was her sole desire: to leave forever the eternal motionless attitude which hurt her, to lean over and fall face forward on the floor, shaking off at once the burden which crushed her down upon herself, and the pain in her bones. She felt that the earth was calling her and that, if she could fling herself forwards, lay her worn-out body on the cool soil and stay there several moments, the intolerable weariness of her members would turn into repose.

But several times an hour some one came to lift her up on her hard chair, to shake her shoulder, to dispel the sweet unconsciousness which always seemed on the point of arriving, and she had to force her dried chest and throat to pronounce once again the words which she had learned formerly, which no longer had any meaning for her, and which her own ears no longer heard. If only—O pitiful God!—she could find the strength to lean over and let herself fall forward, to reply to the call of the earth!

The silence lasted a long time. The logs burned out, Grand-Grégoire came to cast others on the fire, and turned to sit down. The clouds continued to march past in the saddened sky, and the gray light remained always the same through the long hours.

But something approached slowly on the plain. Grand-Grégoire rose and looked out of the little square window. It was a long-bodied automobile bringing several persons, four or five; now they had got out and were coming nearer, stopping often and speaking to each other with gestures indicating the distance. Strangers? They were going to come to the museum, without any doubt, and their appearance promised a harvest of silver coins.

Grand-Grégoire again polished the glass of the show-case with his sleeve, approached the old woman, and touched her shoulder.

"Hey, mother! Here's some folks coming!"

He waited several moments and shook her again:

"Hey!"

He had never been brutal with her; but suddenly he was seized with a fear, and his fist grew heavy.

"Hey! Wake up!"

The push had made the slight body sway. It sank back on itself even more than usual, and began to slide to the floor in a singular posture. He lifted it up at once and leaned it against the back of the chair; but the spineless inertia of this body and of the wagging head, and the look which he bestowed upon the wrinkled face, had all told him the same thing at the same time.

Aunt Ferdinand saw him recoil a step, and understood at once.

"She's gone."

Grand-Grégoire remained mute and shook his head.

Through the window he could see the groups of strangers approaching slowly, and the sight caused him to grasp instantly the extent of the disaster. With-

out the centenarian, his museum was no longer anything but a crude, ineffective cheat, which would attract no one. It was their means of living which had departed with her. The agony of the coming poverty seized him by the throat, and Aunt Ferdinand, who had also understood, leaned over and looked at the corpse with incredulous, terrified eyes. The wood crackled on the hearth, marking the anxious moments.

Another glance through the little window looking out over the plain, and suddenly Grand-Grégoire, having decided, made haste. He took the inert body in his arms, lifted it from the high-backed arm-chair, and motioned wildly with his head to the other old woman.

"You! Come here, you."

Aunt Ferdinand rose with difficulty, wavering on her stiff legs, and dragged herself to the arm-chair, where she sank in her turn. Nothing was changed; the fire on the hearth lighted up another withered face which revealed a touching age, and the desiccated hands, with swol-

len veins, which trembled on the black skirt, sufficed to excite pity.

But Grand-Grégoire went round and round the one room of the house, bearing in his arms the slight, slender corpse which old age was already beginning to stiffen also, and he sought desperately a hiding-place. The bed? But the print curtains did not close. Some dark corner? He looked and shook his head.

Voices were already heard near the door, and he, in turn, began to tremble and to lose his head, when his look suddenly fell upon the great walnut wardrobe. One arm, one hand, were enough to support the withered corpse of the centenarian. With the other hand, he opened the great door, and he took in at a glance the whole interior. The meager piles of linen, the broadcloth garments carefully folded, occupied the two shelves; below there were only a few coverlets, empty sacks, and the worn-out harness of the horse they had been obliged to sell when the son died. Would there be room?

The pitiful body, doubled up, disappeared in the bottom of the great wardrobe; the head rolled on a woolen coverlet, and one of the dried hands seemed to make a last gesture, coming to rest against the wall. Grand-Grégoire shut the door as swiftly as his trembling hands permitted, and turned round just in time.

"Is this the museum?"

"Yes, come in."

There were five of them: three men and two women with rich cloaks. Grand-Grégoire pointed out the show-case; they approached and began to examine the weapons and the dolman with the holes in it; in the arm-chair facing the hearth, Aunt Ferdinand struggled against her agony, and sought to recall what she should say. And Grand-Grégoire, feeling as yet incapable of reciting the daily lesson, remained stupidly backed up against the wardrobe, his hands spread against the doors, as if to prevent the sinister secret which he had shut up inside, from coming out.

If he had known . . . if he had been able to divine what infinite contentment the old woman had found in death, and how sweet to her who had waited too long, was the abandonment of the body flung there, without respect, bent and twisted on the coverlets and bits of leather, her head against the wood of the wardrobe!

THE DESTINY OF MISS WINTHROP-SMITH

T was only after changing cars at Stratford that Miss Winthrop-Smith opened her bag to take out and re-read once more the letter which she had received that very morning, and which had been uppermost in her mind ever since.

She settled well back in her seat, sitting very straight, her head against the car window; then, casting a glance of haughty distrust at her neighbors, she unfolded the sheet of paper. In the upper left-hand corner was a somewhat complicated design showing several flower-pots, a double row of hedges disappearing toward the horizon, and the corner of a greenhouse with a slender fountain playing among climbing plants. In the right-hand corner the name of the owner of all these things: *W. G. FIRKINS*, stood forth in bold

type. Below, in smaller type, the words: "*Nurseryman and Florist,*" indicated his calling.

A painstaking hand had traced, in round, regular characters, at the top of the sheet:

"*Dear Miss Winthrop-Smith:*

and then continued, a line lower:

"I am aware I am taking a great liberty . . ."

The rest of the letter was merely humble devotion and the desperate audacity of the timid.

Three times recurred the expression, "*I take the liberty . . .*" "*the liberty I take . . .*" "*this liberty . . .*" and Miss Winthrop-Smith underscored these faults of style with quick strokes of an imaginary pencil. When she had read the letter entirely over again as far as the signature, which also was round and regular, like a copperplate, she examined, for a moment, the vignette with the neatly trimmed hedges disappearing in the distance, and the fountain among the leaves and softly curving stems. Then, folding

the letter carefully, she looked up and stared straight ahead, a faint smile on her lips.

Poor Mr. Firkins! He hadn't found the courage to speak! He had had to write; and even his formal proposal, carefully worded and written, read like an apology! Each phrase betrayed his inmost conviction that for him to aspire to the hand and heart of Miss Winthrop-Smith was the height of audacity, a mad ambition, perhaps impudence; and Miss Winthrop-Smith, holding the folded letter in her hand, and watching the houses of Bow and Mile End race by the car window, was inclined to share this opinion.

A whole section of Leytonstone, the congregation of the little Baptist chapel on the Square, and, in general, all those who happened to talk, however briefly, with Mrs. Winthrop-Smith, were no longer ignorant of the fact that Miss Winthrop-Smith had a most rare and desirable situation with the firm of *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd., Shipping Brokers.* Of course, Mrs. Winthrop-Smith might have con-

sented to admit that this position had originally been, and still was, nominally, nothing more than that of stenographer; but what counted was the competence which Miss Winthrop-Smith had acquired in this business, the intelligent zeal which she had displayed from the start, and the blind confidence which her capacity and her judgment had inspired in the leaders of this colossal enterprise. New acquaintances, presented to Mrs. Winthrop-Smith coming out of church Sunday morning, during the few minutes when rigid frock coats and stiff silk dresses exchange solemn amenities, always bore away from these conversations the strange vision of a blushing, somewhat embarrassed Miss Winthrop-Smith, hymn-book in hand, sitting in the centre of a system of cables and telephone lines, ruling and directing the merchant fleets of the whole world in their courses. So that to marry Mr. W. G. Firkins, Nurseryman, would have been something of a comedown. She did not pronounce the word, but she felt it.

Although evil tongues pretended that he really belonged to the Primitive Methodist sect, and not to the Baptists, he often came to their chapel and always wore exceedingly high, stiff collars and blue serge suits which seemed eternally new. He seemed to make a point of being impeccably dressed, as if wishing to exalt the character of his calling by his personal elegance. He had even appeared once or twice, recently, in a frock coat with silk lapels, and with a top hat, beneath which his pink, boyish face shone with cleanliness and honest candor.

Poor Mr. Firkins! She repeated the words several times mentally, with a pitying smile, then suddenly asked herself why she instinctively called him "poor." She came to the conclusion that it was because she was going to refuse him. Poor Mr. Firkins! In his neat, correct Sunday clothes he might be presentable, prosperous looking; but she remembered having seen him one day at work in his garden. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and from the pockets of his huge

apron protruded the implements of his calling: pruning shears, packages of seeds, wooden pegs, string, and a funny little plant which seemed to hide its head and show the world only several inches of stem and a mass of stout, short, brown roots.

He had blushed at being discovered in this costume; but she had shown herself gaily and affably condescending, and she had visited the whole establishment with him, listening to his explanations, asking intelligent questions and praising each clever device in tactful appropriate terms. He had shown her everything with the ingenuous respect of a vassal: the strictly ordered shrubs, imposing by their number but touching in their frail nudity; the hothouses filled with flowers, whose colors she praised in gracious terms; all sorts of plants whose Latin names he cited without vanity, almost apologetically; and, above all, a little, isolated greenhouse where he was trying timidly to raise grapes.

The walls were hung with slender,

naked, anæmic stems whose tendrils held themselves out like suppliant hands; but, in a corner, by some inexplicable miracle, a plant more robust than the others bore a bunch of grapes. It was a nice bunch, not very big, ripe or beautiful, but full of promise—a nice, little bunch, all told, with round, hard, violet grapes. Silently he had nodded in its direction, and he had remained lost in contemplation, his hands plunged into the pockets of his apron, like an artist dreaming before a budding masterpiece. The damp soil smelt good, the air was soft and languid; and, all at once, a pale ray of sunlight had filtered through the glass roof, like a friend, to gild and glorify the single pretty bunch of grapes. . . .

Miss Winthrop-Smith looked up with a tight little laugh, which was almost a sigh, and saw that the car was entering dark night. Behind, Mile End Road stretched out interminably, barely veiled by a slight mist, while fifty yards ahead everything had disappeared, and they advanced gropingly, with infinite pre-

cautions, enveloped by a dark, suffocating, almost palpable atmosphere which seemed to mystify all the senses at the same time. A few stray, feeble gleams penetrated it vaguely. They were distant, detached from the world; but they were divined to be quite close, and the clanging of bells came from infinite distances to announce the approach of sombre masses which loomed up immediately.

"The fog again!" thought Miss Winthrop-Smith, and she consulted her watch with irritation. The lighted interior of the car gave an impression of the Ark steered slowly through the shades. With resigned countenances, the passengers regarded the opaque air through the windows, and the motor-man, who cut off the current every second and sounded the unknown with incessant clanging, seemed, lost himself, to lead them towards adventurous destinies.

She again mechanically opened the letter which she held in her hand, and this time the vignette with the neatly clipped hedges, the flower-pots and the

greenhouse, and also the humble phrases so carefully written, filled her with emotion. William George Firkins . . . What a good, honest face he had! What a clean, healthy color, at once rosy and tanned! And how straightforward his pale blue eyes were! Everybody said that he was doing well, that he was sober and conscientious. He would make a faithful, devoted husband, full of respectful consideration, whom it would be pleasant to rule without arrogance and to recompense nicely; and life would be tranquil and sweet, on the edge of the shrubberies . . .

The car stopped, the conductor fathomed the fog, called out: "*Aldgate, all change!*" and the passengers, getting out one by one, groped their way to the pavement. It was late, and Miss Winthrop-Smith had to take the short cut through Middlesex Street, which she hated. Happily, this morning the fog spared her the spectacle of the sordid activity of shops and factories, of mouldy house-fronts and

of the windows of the Jewish bakeries where the cakes displayed seemed to be merely viscous, agglutinated balls. At last she reached Bishopsgate Street and the offices of *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd.*

Scarcely had she arrived when a sharp ring summoned her to the office of Mr. Harrison, Jr., a very young man who strove to disguise his youth and touching inexperience under a rigidly solemn aspect. Without wasting a glance on the virginal grace of Miss Winthrop-Smith, or the neat way in which she patted a stray lock of hair into place, he repeated in a monotonous tone, without pauses or inflexions:

"Good morning. Cable. 'Muller, Odessa. Have firm offer steamer 3,600 tons. Prompt delivery . . .'"

Already Miss Winthrop-Smith's precise, agile pencil skimmed across her notebook, tracing in sure hieroglyphics the probable fate of a shipload of barley, billed to Liverpool, which, in the end, would furnish nourishment for millions of

little babies. At Leytonstone, Mrs. Winthrop-Smith, ignorant of the grandiose task which her daughter was zealously performing, sat peacefully reading her "*Daily Mirror*," while William George Firkins oiled his pruning shears absentmindedly, sighing deeply.

And so, all the morning, the traffic of the world filtered through Miss Winthrop-Smith's pink fingers in the form of letters, circulars, cables, which had to be coded, de-coded, taken down, typewritten and submitted to Mr. Harrison, Jr., who sat alone in his sanctuary, imposing, motionless, austere, yet caressing, perhaps, some ingenuous dream behind his impenetrable mask.

At one o'clock Miss Winthrop-Smith went to lunch. Outside, darkness still reigned, but the fog blanket had left the earth. It now hung above the housetops like a celestial menace, or the effect of some terrible enchantment, intercepting all light and leaving uncovered the sur-

face of the earth, where men and vehicles swarmed like insects threatened by a gigantic sole, hurrying to their tasks before the scourge descended upon them again.

At the marble table of the "Lyons," where she lunched, Miss Winthrop-Smith looked almost with disgust at the portion of cold meat she had ordered, and even at the flour-dusted roll and the halved tomato which accompanied it. Perhaps it was the fog, or else Mr. Harrison, Jr.'s sharp irony in correcting a few minor mistakes, which took away her appetite. Or was it, again, the unconscious effect of the vision which had haunted her from time to time this morning, slipping between her eyes and the keyboard of her typewriter the corner of a greenhouse, tufted with leaves and with green shoots, a square of glass through which entered the sun, and rows of shrubs, stretching out infinitely under the tender sky. . . . She sighed again, holding her fork with her finger-tips, stared out through the plate-glass windows at the street lights

dancing under the opaque sky, and felt the ugliness of the world.

The tinned beef, drying up on her plate, reminded her of the horrors of the Chicago stockyards; in the innocent tomato, a shade over-ripe, she saw a rotting, tasteless fruit, whose center was no longer anything but a brownish mass powdered with seeds.

As for the waitresses who came and went, joking with the regular patrons, they appeared to her quite definitely coarse creatures, with neither tact nor decency, more intent on flirting with men customers than on performing their service properly. And the gardens at Leytonstone, the little house hung with climbing plants, the cold-frames and the nurseries, the grape hothouses, the paths about the beds which seemed to invite to peaceful, proprietary promenades, stick in hand, hair blowing in the breeze, heavy-soled shoes sinking into the soft soil—all this came back to Miss Winthrop-Smith and seemed to form a sort of rustic Eden, a haven of peace offered her by William

George Firkins, brimming over with respectful love, and beseeching her with his ingenuous eyes.

From two till five the pendulum swung back and forth unceasingly. Sometimes Miss Winthrop-Smith's eye fell on the parallel rows of desks, lined up the length of the office; on the high stools scattered here and there; on the numerous employees of all ages harnessed to carefully distributed tasks. She heard the incessant ringing of telephones, the banging of doors, the indistinct mumble of messenger-boys as they hurriedly tossed their orange envelopes upon the counter, the click of other typewriters in the adjoining room, and her heart swelled with pride. *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd.!* She had her part in it—in this complex, powerful organization; in this name which spread itself on letterheads, on envelopes, on every page of the Shipping Gazette, on the huge brass plate which decorated the entrance of the building in Bishopsgate Street, alone, without other information,

without commentaries, nothing but the name, majestic, solitary, in grave, sonorous words like the sounds of a great cathedral bell: *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd.!* And, when she thought of it, the idea of the presumption of Mr. William George Firkins, nurseryman, in offering her his heart and his hand, seemed positively comic.

And then, suddenly, a little later, an impertinent office boy brought her a copy of a circular to manifold on her machine. For an hour her fingers danced on the keyboard, while her lips repeated mechanically, phrase by phrase, the same tedious words. The air was overheated, the floating dust irritated her throat, the ringing of the telephone and the banging of the doors fell like hammer-blows on her exasperated nerves, while the pile of papers to be typed seemed scarcely to diminish. . . .

She stopped a second in her work, stretched to drive the cramps from her shoulders, closed her eyes under the blinding light of the electric bulbs, and

visions came to haunt her a moment—visions of greenhouses, with leaves patterning the panes, and of pretty, light green stalks springing up from the mould, of ordered shrubs bending one after the other in the breeze, like a series of courtly curtsies; of a neat, orderly little house, half hidden by vines, in the springtime; and still other visions as well, all gentle and refreshing, symbolic of a quiet, simple life, close to the earth, of freedom, of little tasks accomplished at leisure. . . .

The day drew to its close. Mr. Harrison, Jr., having signed his mail, consulted his watch and was about to leave, when a messenger boy suddenly brought into the peaceful Bishopsgate Street office an echo of the quarrel which, at that very moment, was, in the harbor of Hong-kong, engaging the captain of the *Arundel Castle* (4,500 tons, Class A-1, at Lloyd's) and the manager of a German firm. In a cable several lines long, at five shillings the word, the honest British sailor had tried to condense his vehement indignation

at the conduct of these unscrupulous strangers who, on some insignificant pretext, claimed the right to break a duly signed contract, and refused him his cargo.

Caught by his chief clerk just as, at last, he felt free to go, Mr. Harrison, Jr. had no trouble in sharing this indignation. Immediately he called upon the main house at Hamburg, and its Hongkong branch, to respect their given word and fill the hold of the *Arundel Castle* with rice and earth-nuts, under threat of colossal indemnities. Meanwhile the captain received orders to insist on his rights, and to submit a full list of expenses; in addition to which, as a precautionary measure, five brokers in London and on the Continent were invited to offer other cargoes.

From one end of the office to the other, employees who had been secretly preparing to leave, remained seated on their stools and pretended to be very busy arranging unimportant papers, while Miss Winthrop-Smith, her eyes shining, a fever-

ish glow in her cheeks, spread across the world the majestic ire of *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd.* The cables gushed from her machine, one after the other, correct, complete, in long, unintelligible code-words which the chief clerk, standing by her side, checked up one by one; and scarcely were the cables finished, when the letters confirming them already began to take shape beneath her fingers, in lines scanned by the click of keys worked at top speed, blending in an uninterrupted clatter which, every twenty seconds, stopped short and began again after the sharp ratchet sound which announced the passing from one line to another.

She had just begun the last latter, when Mr. Harrison, Jr. himself, his hat on his head, came to see how things were going. By the time he had signed the letters already written, Miss Winthrop-Smith was finishing the last line; and, standing beside her, he watched, for a moment, her slender fingers hammer the keyboard, nimble, sure, disciplined, manœuvring without error or loss of time

under Miss Winthrop-Smith's zealous eyes and her pursed-up mouth. When the letter was finished, she tore it out of the machine and handed it to him with an assured gesture.

The chief clerk who, blotting-paper in hand, hovered by, remarked obsequiously:

"Now that's what I call quick work! And it isn't every stenographer who can write at that speed without making mistakes!"

Mr. Harrison, Jr. signed the letter with an august smile, and replied, as he rose:

"Yes! Miss Winthrop - Smith is a wonder, a real wonder!"

Alone, the "wonder" pressed her hands to her temples, closed her eyes a moment, and then remembered she still had something to do.

Mr. Harrison, Jr.'s praise still rang in her ears, like the sweetest music. In spite of the headache which was beginning to grip her temples, she felt singularly alert, tense, over-excited, yet lucid. Each of her movements seemed to her prodigiously exact, calculated, like clockwork.

She stretched out her hand, took a sheet of paper, slipped it into the machine and tapped the date. Then she jumped two or three lines, set the margin at "15," and stopped, her hands raised . . . But she quickly made her decision, and it was worthy in every way of the important part she played in the firm of *Harrison, Harrison & Co., Ltd.*, which menaced German firms with a fiery sword. "*Dear Mr. Firkins,*" she wrote at one go, jumped a line, paused once more briefly, then began:

"*I fully appreciate the . . .*"

Now and then she hesitated an instant to find the elegant, polite expressions which, without being arrogant, would nevertheless give Mr. Firkins to understand that he had aimed a little too high . . . And when she had finished the letter, re-read and signed it, she said to herself that it would be difficult to improve upon it.

Five minutes later she left the office, envelope in hand, went to drop it into

the nearest box, and turned back toward, Aldgate.

And then suddenly, before she had taken a step, the panorama of Bishopsgate Street filled her eyes with its dismal ugliness: the drizzling rain, the sticky mud on the pavements, the melancholy gaslights which seemed to stand guard, like sentinels, over the sombre buildings, the discouraged gait of the tired horses on the wet asphalt, the people pouring out from every door, with sunken eyes, drawn features, hurrying, backs bent beneath the drizzle.

With an involuntary grimace of fatigue and relief, she recalled what the rain was like in the Leytonstone nurseries, where it fell in fresh drops, driven by the wind, like wholesome little kisses on the leaves and on the skin; and she thought of heavy-soled boots treading the elastic soil, of the great fire burning behind closed blinds . . . Or else of the shelter of the greenhouses, where the air is soft and mild, sometimes perfumed, as in a little fairy world, much better ordered

than the outside world, and of the grapes, ripening under the glass . . .

She remained standing, her feet in the mud, her heart sinking, as she thought of all the inestimable things which are thrown away in a day, and which never return.

TRUTH FAIR

THE passage led to a narrow court, a sort of truncated alley with place for two low, mouldy houses on each side and, at the end, a shed where stood several push-carts in the last stages of dilapidation. The first door in the passage, on leaving Brick Lane, opened into the room behind the shop of Patricus, the baker; a little farther along opened a second door and a broken window adorned with a large patch of gray paper in the center. Above the paper, swung a sign which bore, in golden letters, the words: *S. Gudelski, Shoemaker;* below, a line of Hebrew characters and, lower still, written clumsily in chalk, *Repairs done.* Two pairs of shoes, worn but polished, one on either side of the paper square, constituted the window display, and the door, always open, revealed the scaling plaster walls of

the shop where the old man bent from morning to evening over his block, handling the shoes with hurried gestures—seeking to make up, by industrious application, for the weariness which caused his worn hands to tremble on the tools and the bits of leather.

The room was two feet below the level of the passage, and was reached by three stone steps. It was extraordinarily low-ceiled, but large enough so that the single gas-jet could not light it entirely. The bright glow embraced the old man's polished skull, the slanting line of his yellow, wrinkled face bent over his work, his arms, bare to the elbows, on which the swollen veins stood out; it cast also its cruel light on the frock-coat hung on the wall—a shabby old levite, threadbare, covered with spots, and prodigiously ancient; but, two steps away, began the darkness which half shrouded the opposite extremity where nothing was distinguished but an old leather armchair occupied by a vague form almost entirely enveloped in odd pieces of cloth. A

more attentive examination revealed this to be a human form—a heavy form, in which nothing lived but two tarnished onyx eyes, a quick breath, and a hand which travelled lazily, but without stopping, between the face and a paper bag placed on a stand. All this was seen with some difficulty; but those who visited the shop did not need to see. Everyone knew that the thick form in the armchair was Leah Gudelsky, who was slowly dying. She was monstrously fat, with a fat which cushioned her hands and which stretched the waxen skin taut on an enormous face; but it was easy to see that her life was ebbing away. This was detected by her weak, rapid breathing, the deep rings round her dull eyes, the extreme lassitude indicated by each gesture of her monstrous hands.

All the matrons of Brick Lane had said, turn by turn with a knowing air: "It's consumption, the doctors don't understand anything about it!" Gudelsky and Leah herself had invariably repeated: "Yes, it's consumption!" and

all knew that the end could not be slow in coming. The only human thing left in her was her passion for sweetmeats, and these were about all she lived on.

Every morning her father went to a neighboring shop to lay in a store of bonbons at three-pence a pound, and of caramel crumbs swept up after the day's sale. Sometimes a sympathetic neighbor brought her offering in a paper twist.

Then, until evening, the old cobbler worked without respite, cutting, nailing, paring the leather, worrying the shoes wedged between his knees, stressing each busy gesture with a swing of his body, with a quick jerk, as if to accelerate the lagging motions of his worn-out hands; and, until evening also, Leah sucked the candies without a word, filling the great leathern armchair with her already almost insensible mass, seeming always to listen, to await from moment to moment, as she munched, the call which was bound to come.

Outside, at the entrance to the dark passage, were Brick Lane and the corner

of Thrasol Street. The first shop on the left was that of Rappoport, the tailor; then came Agelowitz, the pork butcher; Pomerantz, hairdresser and perfumer, and Sunasky, whose window displayed prayer shawls and Hebrew pamphlets. A little farther along, ran Dean and Flower Street with its two rows of sordid houses, where the submerged throng of the East End went to seek asylum at the rate of four-pence a night. Those who had been unable to raise this sum, and who wandered aimlessly through the streets, awaiting the dawn, dragged between Whitechapel and Hoscton their bruised feet and their confused dream of an Eden where there would be a great fire and mattresses to stretch out on. Backs bent, they limped along the pavement, keeping close to the wall, letting scraps of their soliloquies fall in the deserted porches, and regarding with the same sly, hostile look the shops and the passers-by—all that other portion of humanity which had eaten and knew where to sleep; and, if degrees were

possible in their jealous malevolence, the best hated must have been those whose names, so little British, were inscribed on the shop-fronts; for these, surely, were not among the submerged. Only yesterday, it seemed, they had been seen disembarking from the hold of German or Russian steamers, ragged and miserable, watching with an anxious eye the bales and the boxes which held all their belongings; and the second generation found them solidly established in these streets of the overflowing Ghetto, certain among them still needy, others already comfortably off, but almost all well fed, fat and prolific, friends of law and order. They were at home in Brick Lane. The shops displayed for them the familiar commodities, the very posters spoke to them in their own tongue. It was their young men who, work over, smoked cigarettes indolently in the doorways of the shops; and it was their daughters who passed by twos and threes, in their newest dresses, on the Friday evening pilgrimages, westward bound, to seek

finer, better-lighted streets, to gaze on the palaces which might one day be the abode of their race, to choose the camping-place of the hordes of the future, the multitudinous tribes promised by their vast haunches.

Two steps from the street, in the basement where the old cobbler wore out his hands on the hard shoes of the poor, the future was not among the things which counted. It was the present which counted, the present which was born anew with the ticking of each second, and against which he had to struggle endlessly. For the old man, it represented an alternative of poorly paid work and of repose, the precursor of famine, and the exorbitant claims of his customers who, poor themselves, thrifty and hard on others, demanded much leather and much hard labor to be finished without fail for the morrow, the Sabbath—all for a trifling sum; while for Leah, each minute of the present represented still a little light and breath gained, a motion which was an effort, and, on her palate,

the sweet sensation of the candy which revived once more her numbed nerves. The swift, hurried strokes of the hammer fell dully on the leather; when they stopped for an instant, nothing else was heard but the distant sound of people passing in Brick Lane with, nearer at hand, the murmur of the gas and the feeble panting which came from the obscurity; and soon the tapping began again, faster than before, hurriedly, frantically, for fear the first moment of idleness might seem a desertion—might open the door to all the irreparable things which must still be held back a little longer.

Outside, there was a sound of light, almost furtive steps. A shadow filled the doorway, descended two steps, stopped on the third, in the full glow, and, when the tapping of the hammer had stopped, a clear, sweet woman's voice was heard. It said: "I come to you in the name of Christ, who died for us."

Old Gudelsky looked up at the apparition, regarded it an instant, and bent anew over his work. At each motion,

he shook his head a trifle with the lurking smile of an old man full of experience, and the hammer-strokes fell faster and stronger as if to drown the echo of the childish words.

The unknown woman remained motionless on the threshold, standing very straight, in an attitude of peaceful assurance. She took in, at a single glance, the scaling, sweating walls, the foul earth floor, the broken silhouette of the old man, and made an offering of this misery and of her piety to Him who sent her. Her voice arose once more, assured and sweet:

"I come to you in the name of Christ, who died for us."

The cobbler shrugged his shoulders with a weary gesture, and said, without anger:

"You are sure you have not mistaken the street? We are all heretics about here."

She replied gently:

"There is room for all in the peace of the Lord!"

He sighed an instant without saying

anything, and turned in his hands the shoe he had just finished. He held it quite close to his face to get a good look at it. For his sight was no longer very good, and his lips moved gently. Perhaps he was congratulating himself on a piece of work well done. Perhaps it was a timid protest against the visits of importunate apostles. This tall, slender figure, standing full in the light on the threshold, embarrassed him. From the evangelist issued an appeal which refused to be stifled, a sort of silent *hallelujah.* A boundless faith shone in her clear eyes, clad her still childish features with a confident dignity. She knew that she was charged with an irresistible message, that she bore an elixir which healed all ills, and seemed to await, at any moment, a certain miracle. Respect for her mission held her straight, almost motionless, for fear a graceless gesture might disfigure her divine burden.

She spoke anew, in a gentle voice which rose at the end of each sentence, as if reciting the verses of a psalm.

"Just now," she said, "you are in the darkness; but if you come to Christ, you will be in the light, for the truth is there."

The old man laid down on his knees the tool he was holding, and drew his hand across his forehead. In the yellow gleam of the gas, his wrinkled face had an expression of ingenuous simplicity, the naïvely attentive air of a man who seeks painstakingly to do what is right.

"Surely!" he said, "the truth! Surely! But do we ever know it? It is so hard!"

The girl shook her head and replied indulgently:

"What is hard is to leave the ways of error; but if you follow Christ, the ways are easy, for He has said: My yoke is easy and my burden is light. And there is no merit save in Him."

He sighed once more, chose another shoe in the heap and, installing it between his knees, looked at it with a dreaming air; then he spoke to himself, wrinkling his forehead, and from time to time raising his candid eyes to the light.

"That is it," said he, "surely! We are all seeking the truth; but it is so hard! There are all sorts of truths, little and big, and there is a truth for everyone, but how many of them last? I myself have seen the truth face to face, like you, several times, even, and each time it was a different truth; but I have lived too long and my truths are dead. Yes! You are going to tell me that there is but one truth, which is yours; and that you are sure of it; but I, too, was sure; I was sure several times!"

He leaned forward a little, his hands on his knees, and across his old, yellow, wrinkled face passed a look of touching distress, the pang of an unappeased hunger which would suddenly awake.

"In Warsaw," he said, "in Warsaw, I was sure, and the truths yonder are stronger than those here. Those here are not so important, after all—they can wait; but yonder it seemed that, if everything were not changed without delay, the world would crumble in its own rottenness, and that there was so much

injustice and misery, so many lies, it could not last a day longer. Yes! I was sure, and there were many like me. We had meetings, you see, in a shop, secretly, and all those who came there were sure. They were peasants and workmen, and university students, and even their professors; and there were some among them who could talk in such a way that they made us weep and cry with anger, because of the injustice and wickedness of those in power. And when they said how it was bound to come to an end, and how the people's cause was going to triumph inevitably, because justice and truth were with it; and how the new age was about to dawn, and tyranny to fall; and how each would live his life freely and without strife, this seemed so simple and so easy to understand that it would be enough to repeat it outside for everything to be changed at a single stroke. Or else they read us books, and then it was clearer still. There were sentences which leaped into your head, which sprang from the pages like flames,

just as the sheen of a sword flashes from the sheath; and even when those of us who could not talk so well, insisted on making speeches, we understood them without listening to the words they said. It was like a hymn whose refrain was sung by our hearts: 'Liberty . . . corruption conquered . . . an end to poverty . . . the end at hand . . . irresistible propaganda . . . the army with us . . . the end at hand . . . Liberty!' "

The old man stopped short and sighed softly; then he leaned forward and took a handful of nails. The evangelist, still motionless, looked at him with eyes opened in surprise. In the silence, Leah's feeble panting and the crackling of the paper bag as she touched it, announced that the appeal had not yet come, that the gods tolerated her yet a little longer.

In a lower voice, continuing to speak to himself, the old man began again:

"That was the truth, nevertheless. We were sure, but such things never happen as they should! They come too soon, before you are ready, and never as you

had foreseen them; some are surprised and are silent, while others act too soon and go too far. At the last moment, it is discovered that the other side has, perhaps, its arguments, too, or at least its excuses; that all the misery does not come from the same side; and then there was too much blood—blood shed by our comrades, also—which did not seem to help matters much, and we belong to a race which does not like blood. Cries and shots, answering bombs, and then more cries; gutters running with burning kerosene which swept the ruin from house to house, our shops burned or pillaged, and our girls shrieking with horror in the hands of soldiers . . . That evening, my truth died; too many terrible things had happened, which were not all the fault of the same men. It is dead. So long as it lasted, it was a fine, strong truth; but after that, I was unable to see it again."

The hammer beat with a dull thud on the leather, drove in one nail, then another, and still others; and, at each nail, the old man shook his head and sighed a little,

as if he were nailing the coffin of the glorious dreams he had had to bury. Silently he pared, filed, polished the leather, contemplated the completed task with a dreaming air, and placed the shoe beside him; then he took another, and spoke anew:

"That truth I have never seen again; but when I left Warsaw and came here, I saw another, and this also was a real truth, and I was sure of it. It was merely a matter now of working hard and obeying the laws; for this time I was in a free country, where one man was as good as another, and there was justice for all, with a chance for everyone.

"While I worked, my truth was there with me, and kept repeating to me that this was the kingdom of peace which had been promised us, and that if I was brave and patient, I should have my inheritance; and once again I was sure. But that is dead, too. It has taken years to die, fading a little every day. My first truth died in an evening, amid cries and bloodshed, and the other wore

itself out slowly, because the things which I awaited were too slow in coming. I worked and worked, and waited, and every morning, when I sat down to my work, it was a little farther from me, and each time less certain and less clear.

"Now I am old, and I no longer await anything—anything but that which must necessarily come. But I have seven children. They will take their turn, and perhaps they will find what I have been unable to find. They will have better luck or they will see more clearly. You see, one seeks, one seeks with all one's might, as long as one can; but those who find are rare, because life is not long enough, and that is the reason why one must have children. They try in their turn; often they see scarcely any further, because they are obliged to begin over again, and then it will be for their own children. I have seven."

The evangelist opened wide her pale eyes on an obscure complicated world. She knew she was right, but she felt also that there were things she could neither

explain nor understand. She shook her head and said simply:

"There is truth only in Christ!"

And after that, she found nothing further to say. She put a tract on a chair, near the old man, among his tools; crossed the room and put another on Leah's lap, then went out.

For a long time still, the noise of the work resounded under the low ceiling; for a long time burned the light which announced to all the existence of a weary old man for whom the hour of repose had not yet arrived; and whenever he stopped for an instant to straighten his aching back or to rub his eyes, he wondered which of the seven children to whom he had given life, and who had left him, would successfully accomplish the heavy task, would attain the certitude which had escaped him. Would it be Benjamin who had left for America, where he was making much money? Would it be Lily or else Deborah, two handsome girls, wary and prudent? A little later he cast a rapid glance towards the shadowed

corner where Leah had dozed away in the great leathern armchair, open-mouthed but scarcely breathing, monstrous and petrified, so little like a living creature that it seemed impossible for her ever to awake. Perhaps it was she, he mused, who would soonest find the truth!

And he said to himself that he, too, would soon find it, no doubt, and that thus his great hunger would be appeased.

FEAR

AM going, as one of Kipling's characters, the naturalist Hans Breitmann, puts it, to tell you a story which you will not believe.

It is about a man who lived very peaceably on his income, was considered all his life to be perfectly normal and well balanced, enjoyed to the very end the esteem of his equals and the respect of his trades-people, and died in a singular manner.

I made his acquaintance at Hastings, a city which gave its name to a celebrated battle, an elegant watering-place which, of all the places I know, is perhaps the one where man has most scientifically disfigured the sea. It would be costly, and far from practicable, to bring the sea to Piccadilly; but there is a very simple solution, which is to transport Piccadilly

to the sea-shore. The result is an admirable promenade five miles long, as wide as the Champs-Elysées, lined on one side by villas, hotels and shops of all sorts, and on the other by a fine masonry wall which, at low tide, forms a very satisfactory background for the beach and, at high tide, holds in check the waves, turn by turn humbled and raging. It is an unequalled spot for smoking a cigar in a well-cut flannel suit, between the splash of the domesticated waves and the harmonies of a Hungarian orchestra; but for those who love the free water and quiet cliff corners, "it is not the thing."

"It was not the thing," apparently, for a smart-looking man whom I met day after day, on this beach-boulevard, and it was probably that which attracted us to each other. We exchanged severe opinions, one afternoon, concerning the locality and its inhabitants; and next day, happening to meet at bath-time, we swam together, with easy strokes, out to where the sea, far from the little children

playing on the sand, from the over-dressed young ladies and from the befrogged orchestras, really resembles the sea and recovers its independence.

He swam perfectly, with neither the impeccable style of a Hoggarty, nor the formidable foot-thrust of a Jarvis, but like a man who is accustomed to the water and is at home in it. Thereafter we took our baths together regularly. He was not talkative and I was even less curious, so that several weeks passed without either of us bothering to find out about the other anything more than he had volunteered. He announced to me one morning that he was leaving that very evening, adding, somewhat to my surprise, that he lived on a little property in Devon, and that he would be happy to see me there if I could find time to go and spend several days with him. He dazzled me with the delights of smoking a pipe face down in the thick grass, and spoke to me of a pond which belonged to him and compared with which the sea, at Hastings, was merely a

dirty basin, without charm. I accepted his invitation and acted upon it a month later.

He lived in an absolutely commonplace brick and plaster house, built on the side of a hill. He showed me, behind it, a garden which ran down the slope and pointed out, with a vague gesture, the valley below us, saying that the water was there. I proposed an immediate bath, but he replied, in an embarrassed tone, that it was better to wait until evening and that, besides, it was tea-time. We returned to the house. His tea consisted of brandy and soda, half and half. He drank three glasses and we talked of bathing and swimming. Races and records did not interest him; he swam the "over-hand" stroke perfectly—I had seen him do it—but he did not even know how it was called. He told me, with a meditative air, that all the men of his family had been very fond of the water. His father had died of a congestion at the age of seventy-two, while bathing in the neighborhood of

Maidenhead, and his brother had been drowned as a child in the water-grass—he did not say where. I wanted, as a matter of courtesy, to tell him a story, too, and spoke to him of a man I had known who, while swimming in a bay on the coast of Ireland, had distinctly seen, several yards away, an octopus measuring six feet, attached to a rock. It inspired him with so terrible a fear that he made for the shore, with frantic strokes, tried to hoist himself to the top of a boulder which turned, breaking his leg, and he remained in the water a quarter of an hour, clinging to the boulder, incapable of stirring, and shrieking with fright.

My host listened to me with wild eyes, his mouth open and his hands clenched on the table. I asked him if he was nervous; he answered no, poured out two fingers of brandy—his hand trembled a trifle—drank it and looked out of the window with a stupefied air.

The sun was on the point of setting when we descended into the valley. We had to cross a rough covert, then go to

the bottom of a steep slope in order to reach the water.

It was a big, wild-looking pond, completely surrounded with brush and thickets, and somewhat curiously shaped. It was about a hundred and fifty yards long and, at the point where we stood, at least sixty wide. But the other end narrowed progressively and ended in a sort of canal which measured scarcely four or five yards from bank to bank, and was completely shaded by the foliage of a clump of trees overhanging it. The water appeared perfectly clear, and yet was so singularly lacking in transparency that, save right inshore, it was impossible to see the bottom.

I began to undress tranquilly, enjoying in advance the luxury of half an hour in the cold water, after a hot day. My host remained several seconds without stirring, then abruptly removed his clothes, flung them on the ground, drew on his bathing-togs, and again stood still, facing the pond and panting slightly. I attributed his evident nervousness to the

influence of the brandy, and could not help thinking that there was a good chance of his coming to an end some day through the same unfortunate congestion which had finished his father.

I entered the water with a bound and, several minutes later, he followed me. After a little hesitation, he first advanced slowly, with prudent strides; then, when the depth was sufficient, he let himself go gently, noiselessly and without splashing, and started at once towards the narrow part of the pond, swimming with singular force and precision. He stopped before the entrance to this sort of passage of which I have spoken, and for several instants remained almost motionless, moving about in the water with infinite precaution, his face turned to the surface, under which he seemed to be scrutinizing something invisible to me. His actions struck me as so strange that I asked him what there could be at that end of the pond. He answered in a low voice: "There's . . . there's a spring," and again became silent. I, too, strove to

distinguish what lay beneath us, and it was not long before I perceived that the depth was much greater than I had at first supposed.

All I could see of the bottom was the ends of the tall grasses which stopped at about a yard and a half from the surface and swayed perpetually, although the water was perfectly calm in appearance. The existence of a spring at the end of this narrow canal which was, perhaps, eight or ten yards long, did, indeed, explain the movement which agitated them. They parted occasionally and then left between them a sort of channel whose depth it was difficult to determine, and which continued, like a path suddenly traced, to the vertical bank at the end. There I could vaguely make out a hole—the spring, very likely—which a new movement of the grasses screened a moment later. It was quite the strangest corner of a pond I have ever seen.

I turned my head to make a remark to this effect to my companion, but the sight of his face made me instantly forget

what I was going to say. He was pale—a fact which could be explained by the extreme coldness of the water—but, above all, drawn and marked with sudden wrinkles, and wore a curiously occupied, troubled expression. I was still looking at him when he swam slowly towards me, always with cautious strokes, and asked me, in a frightened whisper: "There isn't anything, eh?" I was about to answer him gently that there was nothing at all, and that perhaps we would do well to dress, when I felt the deep layers of the pond stirred with a mysterious urge. The tall bottom-grasses opened abruptly as if parted by the passing of a body, and my host, whirling around convulsively, with a sort of groan, fled towards the other end of the pond, stretching out in the water like a hunted animal. His panic must have been contagious, for I followed him at once with the same haste; but I had kept enough presence of mind to note that he employed the "trudgeon" (double-over-arm stroke with a single kick)—a stroke which I had never seen

him use before—and with so much power and skill that, far from overtaking him, I saw him, in spite of all my efforts, gain on me each instant. When I reached the shore, he had already left the water and, seated on the muddy grass, open-mouthed, was panting and gasping in such a manner that I believed he was about to die then and there.

He pulled himself together, however; and, a quarter of an hour later, having dressed, we returned to the house.

I refrained from asking my companion any question concerning the day's incidents, having already catalogued him as an alcoholic, afflicted with nervous disorders, and contented myself with observing him out of the corner of my eye. He was, however, perfectly calm and normal all the evening, drank only a few glasses of beer at dinner and, although not particularly communicative, discussed various topics in the most reasonable manner.

The next morning was equally peaceful. At luncheon I asked him if it would not be preferable to take our bath

a little earlier than the previous evening. He acquiesced, but later found some trivial pretext, and it was almost dusk when we left. He was, as before, not precisely drunk, but unbalanced by the continuous over-excitation produced by the alcohol and, as we approached the pond, gave signs of morbid nervousness. He performed the same pantomime of abject fear and of curiosity in front of the obscure hole where the spring was located, advancing nearer, then nearer still, until, at the sudden recoil of the grasses, he started abruptly in the water before turning to flee.

But I had taken care to place myself a little behind him and, seizing him by the arm as he passed, I stopped him short. I was still holding him, when the water seemed to become agitated behind him and, with a sort of panting, he gave a sharp kick which threw him against me. Then I distinctly felt on my leg the brushing of a long, swift thing which passed close to my body—a thing which seemed to have started up from among

the thick grasses and whose sudden spring shook the deep layers of the pond. I am not easily frightened, and not in the least nervous; but, at this simple contact, fear, frightful fear, clutched at my throat. I can recall nothing but a frantic flight, side by side with a man who, at each stroke, gave a desperately agonized groan. I remember confusedly that he still employed the "trudgeon"—a stroke which he had always told me he did not know—and the strength of his effort left a deep wake behind him in the troubled water; but this time the same force urged us both, and I reached the bank before him.

When we had dressed, I turned a second to look at the pond, before re-traversing the thicket. Its surface was marvelously calm and shone under the dying light like a pewter plate; but it seemed to me that I saw, at the far end, the inexplicable eddies which swayed the bottom-grasses.

Not a word was pronounced between us concerning what had passed, either that evening or the day following; but, when

evening came, I firmly refused to accompany him to the pond and gave him to understand that, seeing the state of his nerves, he would do better to follow my example. He shook his head without saying anything, and went off alone. During his absence I was seized with a sense of the colossal absurdity of the situation and, leaving him a word, I packed my bag and departed without further formalities.

A month and a half later, I chanced to read in the paper a brief item announcing that Mr. Silver, of Sherborne (Devon), had been found dead in a pond belonging to him. When the corpse was discovered, it was half out of the water, the hands clung desperately to the branches of an overhanging willow, and the face was frozen in a mask of frightful horror. The death was attributed to heart failure.

My own version was . . . slightly different; but I did not deem it my duty to give it at the time, for the simple reason that no one would have believed me, any more than you will believe me now.

LIZZIE BLAKESTON

AITH STREET falls into Cambridge Road, and Cambridge Road meets Mile End Road. At number 12 Faith Street, lived the Blakeston family. The father and mother had come from Lancashire shortly after their marriage, and the new generation of Blakestons had never known any other horizon than the rows of dirty houses and doubtful shops which stretched between Mile End and Bethnal Green. To the east were Bromley and Bow; to the west, Whitechapel, then the City and, farther still, surrounded by a cloud of unreal splendour, the West End, where a legendary aristocracy lived amid gold and purple, in self-indulgence and pleasure.

The young Blakestons had only rather vague notions regarding the existence of this far-off aristocracy, and bothered very little about it. The interest of life

was wholly concentrated for them in the ceaselessly recurring question of things to eat—a question which the cruelly irregular resources of the family too often rendered an insoluble problem. When funds were low and credit was exhausted, meals consisted uniformly of weak tea and bread thinly spread with oleomargarine; moreover, the slices were sometimes criminally thin.

These mischances were particularly painful for Bunny, a fat, melancholy boy whose eight years were haunted with dreams of abundant nourishment. During periods of famine, he walked sadly up and down before the shop which sold fried fish and potatoes, or else in front of the one where massive suet puddings, strewn with occasional currants, were displayed side by side with quarters of meat; and the delicious odor of hot grease heightened his despair. In days of abundance, he ate with a fierce resolution; and, even when stuffed, he lacked cheerfulness, foreseeing the fastings to come.

His sister Lizzie was, as befits her sex, less exclusively preoccupied with things of this sort. She did not in the least hesitate, on occasion, to repel violently the incursions attempted by her young brother on her share of the victuals; but when the victuals were wanting, she readily and without great effort affected a lightness of heart which filled Bunny with admiration. He could not understand that his sister had, to sustain her, in the midst of privations and tribulations, her art, which was for her an ideal and a consolation. Lizzie was a dancer.

In any populous corner of London, may be seen, about the Italians and their mechanical pianos, little girls who go through their evolutions in pairs, with solemn determination, and lightly lift their run-down shoes on the greasy asphalt. They despise the childish polka and the languorous waltz. Their dance is a curious mixture of jig, of pavanne and of cakewalk; but the cadence is impeccable, the suppleness of knees and ankles

reveals long years of practice, and they bring to the accomplishment of the rite a gravity which commands respect.

Lizzie Blakeston was, at the age of twelve, the best dancer of Faith Street, of Cambridge Road and perhaps, in a word, of all Mile End. Let an organ be heard in a radius of a quarter of a mile of her abode, and she arrived running and holding on with her hand a dilapidated sailor hat. She rapidly repaired the disorder of her dress, tugged up a stocking, pulled back a sleeve, pushed into place a mass of rebellious locks; then she danced and the local ballerinas withdrew into the shade.

Not a mechanical piano in London played a tune on which she was unable to embroider several ingenious steps: *Genevieve*, *Blue Bell*, the *Miserere* from *Trovatore*, or the *Marseillaise*—all, indifferently, served her young genius. The mincing pace of the minuet and the audacious eccentricity of the cakewalk blended in the evolutions of her slender legs encased in tattered stockings.

The excessive harmony which escaped in floods from the mechanical piano took possession of her like an imperious hand, lifted heavenwards her thin yellow shoes with an offering gesture, rhythmed the movement of her swaying arms, bent her and raised her again, enveloped her slightest movements in an irresistible cadence; and, seized with a glorious intoxication, Lizzie leaped, pirouetted and frisked about in the vise of the measure, offering to the dimmed world a vague smile and hallucinated eyes.

Then silence fell. The Italian resumed his place between the shafts and went away. There remained only a few belated passers-by, a handful of mocking street-urchins, Bunny who, seated on the sidewalk, periodically produced unexpected victuals from invisible pockets, and Mile End Road of a winter's evening, the sticky roadway, and the lights winking in the fog.

The years passed; but years scarcely count in Faith Street. Without, the

tumult of catastrophes or of wars may break loose, sovereigns or ministers may launch proclamations, banks crash, manufacturers make fortunes, and actresses marry peers of the realm; none of these things penetrates the heart of Faith Street. Far away in the west passes the pomp of coronations and of funerals, the candidates at the coming elections implore the votes of the sovereign people on flaming posters, the newsboys run along Cambridge Road, crying tidings of defeat, but Faith Street has no heed; and when night falls, it emerges from the houses, renewing, from door to door, with wailing voice, the eternal themes: the scarcity of work, the dearness of bacon, and the iniquity of husbands.

Not that husbands are in reality guiltier there than elsewhere; only they are generally without work—it is a curious circumstance that all the men are without work in Faith Street—and, as there is nothing in their homes which inclines them to joy, they depart to pursue their ideal in the only way open

to them, two-pence a glass, over a wooden bar. When they have no money, they lean against the wall of the "pub" and smoke resigned pipes while watching the traffic; or else they go looking for work without ever finding it, and return at evening—thirsty, naturally, and full of a legitimate sadness. They are received with reproaches and insults, give free course to their indignation, and Faith Street is filled with sharp outcries and the clatter of overturned chairs.

The children are out-of-doors. They pick up bits of wood and paper in the adjacent streets, build a fire right in the middle of Faith Street, and play at trying to push one another into it. At irregular intervals they return to the houses to see if there is something to eat, but without much hope.

Lizzie Blakeston grew up among all these things. At thirteen, she was entrusted with the entire work of the household, while her mother cleaned the shops in Bethnal Green. The summary upkeep of the four rooms of the house,

the daily seduction of the grocer and the baker who refused to extend their credit, occupied henceforth the greater part of her time, and she had scarcely any leisure left to devote to her art. Moreover, Lizzie took her duties seriously and derived from them a dignity of bearing which provoked bitter raillery among her acquaintances in Cambridge Road. When she returned home, Bunny following close at her heels, carrying a loaf or the paternal pot of beer, she lent but vague attention to the young persons who performed about the mechanical piano, exhibiting to a rather jeering audience the whole gamut of their steps and their attitudes. Invariably one of the dancers stopped and said in a half-friendly, half-mocking tone: "Hello, Lizzie!" Lizzie repressed a last pang of regret, replied graciously: "Hello!" and passed on with a smile. This smile said as clearly as words could have done: "Have a good time, girls, but life is not a game, as you will discover sooner or later. Besides, if my father, Mr. Blake-

ston, does not find anything to eat when he returns, there'll be a row!"

Life had, however, its agreeable moments. Saturday evening Lizzie put on a currant-colored velvet dress, too old to be pawned or sold, but still capable of producing a certain impression of splendour. Her hair, done up in curl-papers all the week, was finally freed, forming a graciously waved fringe which hid her forehead, not to mention two well-disciplined waves above each ear. The remains of her sailor hat were collected on her head and held there by means of a long pin whose glass ball sparkled in the shop lights like an authentic diamond. If her shoes happened to have holes or to have lost their soles, she was content not to notice it. Bunny, disdaining these frivolities, did not even dream of modifying his costume; but he followed her blindly, and both went together in the direction of Mile End Road, whose broad pavements were, on Saturday evenings, lined with marvels.

Nothing was changed in the shops.

They were always the same shop windows which, from Monday to Friday, had presented the same merchandise in the same immutable order; but Saturday evening lent them a special majesty. Five days out of seven they were, after all, merely shops where people who had money could enter and buy, for cash, things that were certainly desirable; Saturday evening their vulgar shop character disappeared, and each window became one of the attractions of a great, marvelous fair.

Certain of these windows, however, excited in Lizzie and Bunny a directly covetous spirit which was not without bitterness. There was a restaurant in Whitechapel Road the sight of which held them captive for a long time, as they slowly sucked in their saliva and sighed at intervals. Behind the glass were displayed a row of square tin dishes which an invisible fire warmed gently from beneath. In one of these dishes, sausages lay browning in grease; in another were portions of meat of various forms; still

others contained mashed potatoes or fried onions. On a sheet-iron plate, boiled or baked puddings, studded with currants, smoked slowly. Behind the dishes, moved an august, apron-clad man in his shirt-sleeves, his cuffs turned up to the elbows, who pricked the meat with an attentive fork, reared or demolished the mountains of onions as the fancy took him, grasped the puddings bodily in order to carve them. Placards on the wall boasted the lowness of the prices: sausage and mashed potato two-pence half-penny; vegetables or pastry, a penny the portion; tea, coffee or cocoa, a penny the cup.

After a long contemplation, Lizzie invariably said, in a detached tone: "Bah! you're not really hungry, Bunny!" Bunny replied, "No," without conviction, and ended by persuading himself. Not being really hungry, he could thus contemplate with an indifferent eye the little carts of the itinerant merchants who sold shellfish heaped up in a saucer and sprinkled with vinegar, or pieces of eel floating in a soft jelly; and also the

pile of bananas and apples, the sugar-covered cakes, and the broken Swiss chocolate sold at reduced prices.

Moreover, there were many other things to see in Mile End Road. Before the doors of the "Pavilion," posters pictured the most tragic phases of the play then running. One of them showed the society bandit, in a scarlet hunting-coat, making a hideous grimace as he pressed to his bosom the heroine, whose face was convulsed with indignation. Another represented the "ring" and two pugilists, bare above the waist. One of them, who had just floored his adversary, stretched out his arms towards a man in the crowd and announced in a terrible voice: "There is the man who stole my wife!" The abject terror of the wretch and the just anger of the boxer were strikingly reproduced in vivid tones.

Finally, there was the crowd: the incessant flood of humanity which oscillated between Whitechapel and Stepney, passing, looking, bargaining, without respite. It seemed as if all the light was concen-

trated on the pavement, and the rest was only a great, deep darkness. People emerged from the obscurity. Under the lights from the windows, or the smoky flames of the lamps on the pushcarts, their faces lighted up, became near and living for an instant, then disappeared once more. The majority offered no interest for Lizzie. They were people such as are seen every day, even in Faith Street: workmen who passed with their wives, clay pipes in their mouths and children in their arms, lovers, mothers buying their Sunday provisions, the gilt-edged youth of Mile End, loitering indolently under the arch of the brewery, where beer is sold through two windows. Lizzie paid no attention to them. But when a group of young Jewesses passed, wearing easily their costly dresses, she followed them with a look that was hostile yet filled with admiration.

Mr. Blakeston, in his moments of eloquence, enjoyed thundering against these strangers, evidently imported from half-savage countries, who came to settle

by thousands in the East End and snatch their means of livelihood from honest workers. He never tired of stigmatizing them, together with the government which tolerated them. The hereditary contempt of the English workmen for the "forriner" was coupled, in him, with the harsh resentment of the disinherited for more thrifty or more skillful rivals. Lizzie had heard him treat this theme many times, and she embraced all the emigrants of Whitechapel and its surroundings in the same crushing disdain, mingled with almost supersitious fear.

Towards the men, the disdain predominated. Their fleshy noses, their still uneasy eyes, their thick lips sometimes arrogant, sometimes servile, marked them, for her, with the indisputable seal of the inferior, ill-known races, Latin, Turkish, or Negro, who swarm in the vague countries of the South, on which the British peace does not yet reign. But when plump, deep-eyed, robust girls of the second generation passed in groups, copiously powdered, a suspicion of rouge

on their lips, with an insolent air, Lizzie's heart overflowed with bitterness and envy. It was the overwhelming injustice of fate, the heart-break of the undeserved happiness of others, the burden of extravagant desires and the certitude of their futility. For Lizzie had very little faith in miracles. And she went away.

Faith Street opened in the night like a dark passage. There was a prudent wait at the foot of the staircase, ear alert, in order to learn whether Mr. Blakeston was not, this evening, in a bad humor; and, if nothing indicated an immediate danger, they went to bed without making a noise.

A day came when the currant-colored velvet dress was seen to be altogether too inadequate; Lizzie had grown and as, very naturally, she continued to grow, leaving behind her the dazzling ornaments which had been the sole pride of her childhood, she entered upon the maturity of her fifteenth year.

Lizzie's fifteenth year had nothing either impertinent or frivolous about it.

At this age, the young beauties of Mile End Road prepare for love by exchanging grimaces and slaps with the representatives of the opposite sex as they chance to meet, or yelling facetious remarks at them across the street; and when, yielding to the ineluctable, they enter, vanquished and docile, the "pays du tendre," the first halts are made before the little cart of the ice-cream merchant, in the orange shop, or in the six-penny gallery of the "Pavilion."

In the midst of these maddening temptations, Lizzie passed like a sonnet heroine, mildly indifferent, calculating the price of bacon and the quantity of bread necessary for the family. To tell the truth, she took no pride in fulfilling conscientiously her housewifely functions. She was simply very much afraid of scenes and brutalities, and strove to avoid them. Once the indispensable was done, she contemplated the disorder and the dilapidation of the dwelling with perfect serenity. She had always known it thus, and felt not the slightest desire of reform. She preferred to sit by

the window and let the minutes and the hours glide by, without thinking of anything, with the obscure sentiment that each moment represented something gained, a little life passed without serious annoyance, one more stage accomplished, without effort, towards that thing which she awaited and which could not fail to come.

It was not the Blue Prince whom she awaited. If the event which was on the way had revealed itself as the apparition of a young and marvellously handsome cavalier, Lizzie would have been cruelly disappointed. It would be something much better—something which would change everything, which would change, at one and the same time, Lizzie herself, the color of the sky, Faith Street, the whole world and the humanity which inhabited it. It would underscore a certain moment of life with a heavy, definite stroke, and a great exultant voice would announce: "Now we are going to begin everything again!" And the beginning again would be something so marvellous

that she did not even try to imagine it.

When she was tired of sitting, Lizzie rose and stretched herself gently. She had neither a morose return to life, nor a bitter awakening. For she had not dreamed. She had done nothing but wait. And as nothing had come this time either, and as it was getting late, she lit the kerosene stove to prepare the evening meal.

It was a monotonous life, but it did not occur to her to complain of it; and when a change came at last, it was under a form which brought her nothing but annoyance. Mr. Blakeston, to whom his life-long experience had, doubtless, taught the dangers of idleness, took it into his head that the household concerns did not really constitute a sufficiently serious occupation to absorb all his daughter's time; and, after some aphorisms on the sanctity of toil, he set out in quest. His efforts were crowned with unexpected success; for, after some weeks of research carried on with a fine activity, he was able to

announce to Lizzie that he had obtained her an employment in a rope-walk, in Commercial Road, at eight shillings a week.

Lizzie showed no joy. She was satisfied to obey. She had henceforth to get up very early, something which she did not like, and to go out, still only half awake, in the cold of the wan morning. She had to toil eleven hours a day in a workshop darkened with floating dust, between walls vibrating perpetually with the roar of the machines whirring below, and Lizzie did not like the work. She resigned herself, however; first, because she was rich in all the passive virtues, and then because there was nothing else she could do.

Her factory companions regarded her at first with distrust. Lizzie made but feeble attempts to heighten her natural charms by artificial means. She preferred, to every other sort, the simple amusements which demand only a trifling effort, the placid pleasures of a lazy little girl; finally, she found no other response to the facetious or gallant remarks of the young

men than a pale smile or a phrase of derisive politeness. She experienced no confusion, and they were all very nice . . . but such things were of no consequence. The belles of the rope-walk judged her speedily and without appeal: she would never be anything but a little goose. Others took her candid detachment for haughtiness, and spoke with a disdainful curl of the lips of this child who put on airs.

But rancour and disdain little by little lost their edge against Lizzie's unalterable simplicity. They grew tired of wasting arrogant sneers on some one who seemed not to be offended by them; and Lizzie was offended by nothing. Her principal concern was not to be late in the morning and to avoid trouble; and she was also ready to render a service, not so much through desire to oblige, as because her own grief left her almost indifferent. When the hostilities of the beginning disappeared, and her comrades formed the habit of giving her friendly taps on the shoulder, saying in a half-tender, half-mocking tone: "Bah,

Lizzie isn't a bad girl!" these testimonials of friendship touched her scarcely more deeply than the insults had done. She received them with the same weak smile, which seemed a façade of gentle, inoffensive charm before vague spaces, obscure limbos, which she herself did not know.

The Saturday when she received her week's salary for the first time, the working-day had been short, so that when she left the factory, it was still broad daylight, and Commercial Road had a festal air. All these people who passed her on the pavement had, like her, finished their work, and were going home. The carriages and the trucks passed very quickly, noisily, in haste to finish their last trip, and all the faces had already assumed a holiday expression. Lizzie went along the streets, happy to feel the warm sunshine on her neck, and thinking of the eight shillings which she held in her closed hand. Pockets were not safe enough; there would probably be some unsuspected hole in them, and the idea of her week's work

scattered in the gutter gave her a shiver of horror. It was at once more prudent and more agreeable to hold the money in a very tight fist.

It took her a little time to realize that this money was really hers. She could wonder how she was going to spend it, and it occurred to her almost immediately that her parents would certainly expect to receive part of it. She was not very sure that it was just, and she knew very well that it would be disagreeable; but she also knew it would be useless to resist.

She stopped a moment and, opening her hand, she contemplated her treasure. There were two half-crowns and three separate shillings. Then a wave of heroism swept over her, and she suddenly decided that she would keep only the three shillings for herself. Thus she sacrificed all idea of magnificent purchases, for you cannot get very much for three shillings; but there would be sufficient to buy portions of fried fish and potatoes for Bunny and herself, then two ice-creams, two theatre tickets, and perhaps there

would still remain enough to acquire a pearl necklace next morning, in Middlesex Street.

When she reached home, she found Mr. Blakeston, who seemed to be waiting. He remarked that it was really very nice to be free like this a whole half day; then he demanded artlessly:

"Where's the money?"

Lizzie handed him the two half-crowns. He looked at them a moment, raising his eyebrows, slipped them into his left palm, and held out his hand once more.

If Lizzie had spoken, she would probably have formulated a vain appeal to justice, an indignant protest, perhaps also remarks which would have called for punishment; but she said nothing. She opened her left hand, her poor moist hand where the three silver pieces had left their imprint on the clenched fingers; and when her hand was empty, she understood, once for all, that this world was only an error, the product of a gigantic misunderstanding from which she was forced to suffer. Blakeston jingled the money

in his hand, gave two shillings to his wife to buy provisions, then, dropping the rest into his pocket, went out whistling.

Lizzie, remaining alone in the room, with Bunny, sat down on a chair and looked out of the window. A big piece of cardboard, leaned against one side of the glass, served at once as blind and as curtain. On the other half, there was a blue rag fastened with two pins and partly raised. The sun had already disappeared from Faith Street. It must still be shining somewhere, on the other side of the houses; but its light had abandoned the two rows of mouldy house-fronts, brought closer together, and there already reigned a mournful half-light which announced, in advance, the approach of evening. After a silence, Lizzie said in a trembling voice:

"If they'd left me the money, I'd have bought you a big dinner, Bunny, and a ticket for the theatre."

Bunny replied feebly:

"That doesn't make any difference."

And Lizzie began to cry.

She cried gently, almost noiselessly,

like a tired child. The dusk arrived slowly to conceal the dirty walls and to fill the chamber. From the next room came, first, a noise of banging doors, then that of grease sizzling as it melted. Bunny, in spite of himself, pricked up his ears; and Lizzie, ceasing to cry, crossed her arms on the back of the chair, and leaned her chin on her clasped hands.

"Their dirty factory!" she said. "They needn't think I'm going to stay there all my life!"

Bunny replied:

"Sure!"

After a pause, she resumed with greater assurance:

"What difference does it make, after all? Their dirty factory! It isn't as if it could last always, what?"

And Bunny, finding nothing better to say, repeated:

"Sure!"

Lizzie had been at the factory for some time, when the monotonous course of her life was interrupted by an event, a great

event: Uncle Jim came to London. She had scarcely suspected his existence. He had never been for her anything but a distant legendary personage, obstinately attached to the black country, the cradle of her family; then suddenly, entering one evening, she found him installed on the best chair in the house, sharing a pot of beer with Blakeston, and proclaiming in a loud voice, with a prodigious Lancashire accent, his utter contempt for the capital and its inhabitants. He excepted, however, his sister's family. In his eyes, the Blakestons were, like him, merely colonists, constrained, by the necessities of life, to exile among the barbarians. At the first glance, he discerned that Lizzie had remained a true daughter of Lancashire, and he contented himself with that affirmation.

All the virtues which he deemed to be the exclusive appanage of the northern counties, were found united in Lizzie, and on her evident defects he closed his eyes. The truth was he had at once conceived for his niece a solitary old man's

profound tenderness, and the advantages of his protective affection promptly made themselves felt. In the first place, he let it be known to all that he would allow no one to annoy Lizzie; and the authority of a man who earns five shillings a day is a thing which Faith Street does not discuss. Moreover, he decreed that he was taking in hand his niece's education, and that, first and foremost, it was urgent and indispensable for her to learn to play the accordion.

He possessed one of these instruments and handled it with an astonishing virtuosity. It was his unique talent and his principal distraction; and he himself was quite ready to remark that, to have attained such mastery, without musical, instruction, his natural aptitude must have been very far above the ordinary. When he played sacred music, the tunes of the hymns and the psalms issued from the accordion with so much force and majesty, it seemed it must be the voice of the Eternal Himself thundering among the clouds; and when he descended again

to the sentimental melodies of the moment, the dragging complaint of the instrument became so touching, so tender, one was forced to believe that the green leather bellows contained an imprisoned soul which, kneaded between his pitiless palms, exhaled its harmonious pain to an appropriate rhythm.

When, for the first time, Lizzie heard him execute *Genevieve, Sweet Genevieve,* with languorous *ralentando* at the right places, she held her breath and thought she would faint. She had always kept a secret tenderness for mechanical pianos, organs, and brass bands, but this was different. It was the miraculous linking of sounds, the true music, enchanting and poignant, which was revealed to her; and the very idea that she, Lizzie, could aspire to produce these quasi-divine harmonies, filled her with a profound agitation. So it was not willingness that she wanted, and she had, in Uncle Jim, an admirable professor, full of sacred fire and of infinite patience. Yet her progress was almost imperceptible, and her uncle himself, though

encouraging her to persevere, had to admit that Lizzie did not seem destined ever to become one of the glories of the accordion.

Even after she had pretty nearly mastered the subtle management of the handles and of the holes, the first rudimentary rhythms which she succeeded in evoking were entirely wanting in life. The instrument which, under the expert fingers of the professor, had roared with majesty or sighed with tenderness, produced, between her hands, only an anæmic complaint, a poor, feeble, uneven melody, less a song than a weak lamentation, interrupted, unskilful, the appeal of a little soul, elementary and sad. Uncle Jim took over the accordion, gave a demonstration, offered a few counsels, preached force and audacity; and Lizzie began again courageously, pressing her lips and opening astonished eyes at her failures.

When he saw her ready to become discouraged, her uncle ended the lesson and played one of the tunes of his repertory, to terminate the evening agreeably. At

other times he condescended to amuse Bunny by reproducing, with his instrument, bird-calls, peals of thunder, and the piercing cries of a crushed dog; and Lizzie, forgetting her despair, laughed to the point of tears.

One evening he attacked a cakewalk tune, and Lizzie, carried away by the music, leaped up, lifted high her skirts, and began to dance. It was a long time, a very long time, since she had danced; but all the steps she had executed formerly returned to her in an instant; and when she had crossed the narrow room twice, from wall to wall, she had become once more the little girl with tattered stockings, whom the droning of a mechanical piano intoxicated like a powerful philtre.

Her uncle, who had first watched her with a smile, motioned to Bunny to draw aside the chairs and, stressing the cadence with the beat of his heavy boots on the floor, he played all the dance tunes he knew—waltzes, polkas and jigs—humming and shaking his head. And Lizzie danced.

She danced because each measure of the music spoke to her with a different voice, whispered to her to turn, to leap from one foot to the other, to tap the floor with her heels, or to advance holding out her arms. She followed the rhythm because she felt she must do so; and the rhythm entered into her and suggested to her the necessary gestures, lifted her feet and forced them to follow an invisible pattern with precise steps, made her knees rise, swayed her quivering body on tense hips, bent her slender neck beneath a heavy vertigo. There were clear, lively cadences which seemed to fill the chamber with joy and give the legs a supernatural lightness, delirious cadences which demanded abrupt gestures and the brutal hammering of the boards with fevered feet. Lizzie followed them all blindly, unfolding from wall to wall her dance, nameless and untrammelled, grave as a rite, primitive as the drunken flight of a gnat in a sunbeam.

Then the world stopped with a shock, and the shadow seemed suddenly to

descend, inexorable, after a long suspense.

The music had ceased, and Lizzie was seated on a chair, panting a little, with a slightly astonished smile.

Her uncle placed the accordion on the floor, rested his hands on his knees, and gave a long whistle.

"But, little girl," he said, "you certainly do know how to dance!"

Uncle Jim understood at once that he had, until then, been on the wrong track in trying to teach his niece music. It was clear that she was not born for the accordion, but for the dance, and that it was on this side they should both direct their efforts.

Lizzie was a little astonished and almost offended to hear it insinuated that she still had much to learn. She remembered the triumphs of her childhood and protested that some weeks of practice would give her back all her former suppleness; but her uncle had his ideas on the dance—particular and very decided ideas

—and when he exposed them to Lizzie, the revelation was almost as complete for her as when she had first heard him play the accordion.

She had accomplished several exercises under his guidance, and was resting. It was the hour when the sandman passes for children, and when tired little workers reflect that there is now only a short night between the present hour and the morrow's toil. Uncle Jim was seated, bending forward, his elbows on his knees, dreamily handling his accordion from which, at each of his gestures, issued stifled complaints.

"You see, little girl, any young goose whose knees are not too stiff and whose waist isn't made of wood, can kick up her feet in the air, break herself in two, and call that dancing. But we can do better than that, little girl, much better! The folks in high society take each other by the waist and turn round, putting on airs, and they call that dancing, too; but if you take a duchess and if you put her on a good, sounding platform two feet square,

and if you play her a dance tune, a real one, which carries you away like the lash on your legs, and you tell her to sing that tune with her feet, well, your duchess won't know how to do it! She won't know how, little girl! And all her airs won't keep her from looking like a fool, because she won't know how."

When she heard this parable, Lizzie clearly perceived that her mission in this world was to do what the duchess would not have known how to do: to get up on a good, sounding platform and to sing a tune with her feet; and that, aside from this, life would never be for her anything but a colorless, joyless thing.

For the first time in her existence, Lizzie knew what it is to have a real desire, a desire which haunts you, which leads you, and which, forgotten for a moment, comes back to awake you with a start, in the midst of the daily routine. She had moments of wild terror—the terror of having begun too late, when there was no longer time, or the further terror of some-

thing unexpected and inevitable, which would come suddenly to stop her. Then her fear was dissipated and, her habitual calm returning, she felt herself invaded by a great hope. She was going, that very day, to return from the factory as fast as she could, to drink her tea, to eat a slice of bread, and her uncle would arrive for the evening lesson. She would listen to all his counsels and would work very hard, without losing a minute, in order to hasten her progress. And she would begin again the next day, and the days following, and many other days as well, until that day when she would be able to mount on the platform, her dream—the compact, sonorous square which would be her pedestal—and there, scanning the miraculous music with the precise tap of her heels and of her toes, to pour out over the world the intoxication of the rhythm which excited her.

When she stared long enough at a certain point on the wall, without thinking of anything, she saw her dream take shape in an image. Everything was there: the

glorious platform, Lizzie, a Lizzie somewhat transformed, who had auroral hair, a conquering smile which was yet very sweet, and probably a pearl necklace; and all about, there would be . . . she did not know just what, but it, too, would be glorious. Certainly not the damp, narrow walls nor the dirty windows of the rope-walk. It was perhaps faces, innumerable rows of bright faces which would form an amphitheatre; but, whatever it was, it would be good, for there would no longer be anything tiresome or ugly. And the beautiful Jewesses of Whitechapel Road would turn yellow with envy.

She was generally recalled to the reality by some noise, or the charitable kick of a neighbour who wanted to save her a fine; and she set to work again cheerfully, with a somewhat superior smile, because she alone knew what was going to happen.

And summer came. It came suddenly, after a late cold spring, and perhaps it filled the countryside with marvels, but it weighed heavily in Mile End and in Stepney. The sun heated the zinc roof

of the rope-walk white-hot, and turned into a stove the long workshop where hemp dust floated in the air; and the warm hours dragged one after the other through interminable days.

Evening arrived, however, but it brought Lizzie only Faith Street, like a long tepid, sunless passage, filled with a stagnant atmosphere wherein blended all the fetid odors of the day. When Uncle Jim was late in coming, she went up to await him in the room on the first floor, and sat down in her favorite place by the window. At this hour, there often came over the roofs of the houses opposite a slightly cooler breeze which announced the approach of night; and, even when the breeze failed, the soft tints of the sky, between the chimney-pots, were a sort of comfort.

Bunny, who generally kept her company, sometimes allowed himself to be touched by the evening peace and revealed to her his aspirations. He indicated the sunset with a vague gesture, and said pensively: "You see, there, where it's

green. Ah! how far away that must be!" And, after a pause: "I'd like mighty well to go there and see!" He was probably thinking only of that part of the world which lay directly below the horizon, with its shades of aquamarine; but Lizzie, imagining that he aspired after the firmament itself, regarded him with a suspicious air, and merely shook her head.

She experienced no desire of that sort. The idea of travel was associated, in her mind, with numerous difficulties, great fatigue, intrusion into an unknown and probably hostile environment. No, she preferred to await her happiness where she was. . . . She felt confusedly that she had a quantity of wishes to formulate; but she could scarcely separate them one from the other. They formed a whole, a complete system, whose advent would come to modify a state of things entirely too defective; but, separated, they would lose their magic.

Little by little gathered the darkness, peopled with vague forms, sprinkled with lights, and Lizzie caught herself dreaming

that, if one of her desires could be realized, she would wish, most of all, to have evening last longer. In the first place, the evening was often cool and agreeable. Work was over, and there was still the whole night before it was necessary to begin again. The harsh necessities of the day, the odious abuses, the flagrant injustices ceased, after all, to be so intolerable. Perhaps tomorrow, or a little later, everything would arrange itself; and, in any event, so long as evening lasted, there was no need to think of it. Evening was an hour of repose and of compensation, which came to rectify, with a light touch, the irremediably warped scales, and to give the poor world almost its whole measure of peace. Lizzie would dearly have loved to have it last longer. For the moment, she demanded nothing more of it.

The creaking of a door announced her uncle's arrival, and she descended to meet him. Several moments later, Faith Street was shaken in its torpor by a refrain which rose alertly and lightly—a dance tune which seemed to launch a

defiance to all heavy, motionless things, and to bear the rest away in an irresistible round. And very soon another sound, still more alert, the tapping of two living feet on the floor, mingled with the music.

At first they followed the cadence timidly, hesitating a trifle. Then when this became lighter and stronger, their beating rose also, precise and clear, scanning the refrain, cutting each phrase of the music up into clean-cut taps; and they ended by dominating the voice of the accordion, by filling the house with a great rhythmic clamour which melted into a continuous roll or spaced itself into intervals, mumbled a prayer with discreet little blows, went mad, changed into defiance, passed through the window, insistent and brave, to tell the indifferent universe that within, behind the stripped walls and the worm-eaten door, there was Lizzie Blakeston, little Lizzie, who danced danced, danced. . . .

One Saturday evening, when she returned, Lizzie found her uncle in the room

on the ground-floor. His face and his bearing exuded mysterious satisfaction. He greeted his niece with a friendly nod, then glanced towards something which occupied the end of the room.

Lizzie followed his look and, clasping her hands, gave an "Oh!" of exultant surprise. The summary furnishing of the room had been enriched since the night before with a square platform built of boards skilfully placed together—a little platform which was divined, at the first glance, to be well constructed, strong and light, elastic as a spring-board and sonorous as a drum.

Lizzie perched herself on it with a leap, tore off her hat and threw it on the table, tapped her heel several times as a test, broke into a sharp laugh, immediately resumed an air of preternatural gravity, and said: "Good!" And Uncle Jim grasped the accordion with a broad grin.

The children who played in the middle of Faith Street stopped suddenly in their games and, after a short search, came to crush multi-coloured faces against the

pane. They arrived just in time to see the dancer stop; for her uncle had placed his instrument on the table and, leaning back in his chair, regarded his work with an air of modest satisfaction.

"Well!" he said, "I did it myself, this afternoon. It's good. It doesn't look like much, but you have to know how." Then he arose and assumed once more his mysterious air. "It's only the beginning," he began again. "Put on your hat, little girl, we're going out." Lizzie opened wide her eyes and obeyed.

They descended Cambridge Road, turned to the left in Mile End Road, and followed the broad pavement as far as the "Paragon." Her uncle said negligently: "We'll not go in this evening, but we've always a right to look at the programme." Lizzie read the names one after the other, saluting those of the stars with admiring exclamations: "George Mozart! Will Evans! . . . Chirgwin! Oh! Uncle! Chirgwin!. . ."

Her uncle answered evasively:

"Yes, it's not bad; but let's see what

they're giving next week. And that! What's that?"

"That" was a yellow poster which announced that the management, in order to discover new talents capable of appearing on a music-hall stage, was organizing, for two weeks later, a grand competition open to amateurs only, of both sexes, who were invited to present a number composed by themselves before a jury made up of persons well known in the quarter.

Lizzie read the poster to herself, in a placid tone, indifferently, and, turning round, encountered the gaze of her uncle, who rubbed his chin as he looked at her with a mocking air. It was only then that she understood, and the thing appeared to her, at the moment, so prodigiously enormous, that she could only open her eyes in surprise, shrug her shoulders and, her fingers stiff with emotion, heave a long sigh, while all the gas-jets on the front of the theatre performed an hysterical saraband before her eyes. Then she remained motionless

on the pavement, still without an idea in her head, her mouth open in the form of an O, holding her breath; and the noise of the carriages and of the trams in the street, a moment suspended, returned to fill her ears with a confused thunder.

The first moment of stupor over, she understood more clearly; and, taking in with a look the broad pavement flooded with light, the imposing theatre front and the uniformed doorman, doubted herself.

"Oh! Uncle!" she cried. "You believe?"

Her uncle smiled a superior smile.

"I take the responsibility myself," he said. "We still have fifteen days, little girl, and you're in good hands!"

After an instant's silence he added:

"And the first prize is two pounds."

They walked a little farther along Mile End Road, retraced their steps and stopped again to read the poster attentively. Then they went home. Lizzie walked with assurance along the middle of the pavement. She held herself very

straight and her cheeks burned a little, but her surprise was entirely dissipated.

She said to herself, very deliberately, that she might perfectly well have guessed it was something of this sort that was going to happen. A little girl who dreams of fairy tales hardly takes the trouble to calculate exactly how and when the miracle is going to manifest itself for her; and she had not attempted to imagine these details in a precise fashion. But the miracle was there. It had not yet arrived, to be sure, but it was almost within reach of her hand, tangible, infallible. Uncle Jim, who did not believe in fairies, answered for it.

It appeared to her nearer and still more certain when she had returned to the little house in Faith Street, where the new platform, pushed into a corner, seemed to await. The room was lighted only by the uncertain gleam which came from the street, and there was no mirror; but Lizzie dragged the board platform into the middle of the room and, from it, facing the window, she sketched several

gracious curtsies and peopled the darkness with her smiles.

It was still merely Faith Street. At intervals were heard a noise of distant quarrels, a child's cry, the complaints of a drunkard who, ejected, bewailed and threatened, turn by turn, before his closed door. The silence itself was peopled with vague modulations, with thousands of those uneasy cracklings peculiar to the fragile houses of the poor, and the feeble light from the street illumined only the scaling walls, one-eyed windows, the narrow roadway strewn with refuse; but Lizzie could now contemplate all this with serenity. She was no longer angry at anybody, she thought already of the present hour with a sort of anticipated tenderness, and experienced only an immense pity for all those who had nothing to expect.

She repeated to herself softly: "In two weeks!" and sketched a sprightly step. The light clack of her soles on the boards troubled the silence of the night, and she stopped short, thinking

she had heard someone stir above. The mere idea that Mr. Blakeston had perhaps returned and might be disturbed in his sleep, chilled her enthusiasm. She went out, closed the door with precaution, and took off her shoes before ascending the staircase.

This fortnight did not appear very long to her. She had waited so long that two weeks more or less did not really much matter, and these two weeks were different from all those which had preceded them. It was no longer a question of hollow dreams or of improbable hopes. The marvellous event which was to inaugurate the new era had taken shape—a shape convincingly, indisputably real. It was no longer anything but a date on the calendar, a date underscored with ink, which nothing could keep from arriving.

And then Lizzie was far too occupied to be impatient.

First there had to be chosen the dance, the irresistible tune which was to ensure

her triumph. Then the music must be copied out on carefully ruled paper for the "Paragon's" orchestra. It was long work, and she had to take terrible pains to avoid blots, to keep to the line and, when it was finished, to remove the finger-marks with a bit of rubber. Then, in addition to all this, time must still be found to work harder than ever, to learn all the shades of the selection by heart, to give, in executing it, all its sure and brilliant "finish" which should contrast with the mediocrity of rival exhibitions. The hours spent in the workshop flowed by with an irksome slowness, but the evenings passed in a state of fever.

It was only in the course of the second week that Lizzie woke up to the fact that there was a capital question which had, until then, been neglected: the costume. She thought of this for the first time one morning, while dressing, went over in her mind the contents of her wardrobe, and abandoned herself to the completest despair. Its inadequacy was so evident that it seemed impossible to arrive at a

satisfactory solution. She considered the problem all day and decided she would be obliged to resort to borrowing. One factory comrade had a hat decorated with yellow feathers which she would perhaps consent to lend. Another possessed a very beautiful black satin gown.

Lizzie recovered her serenity a little; but when she imparted her project to Uncle Jim, he reflected several moments, and presented surprising views.

"Little girl," he said, "if you have the fine hat and the black satin dress, perhaps they'll please the gallery, but you may be sure the folks in the expensive seats won't find them great shucks! They've seen better than that, they won't be astonished, and perhaps, in fact, they won't be pleased at all. You mustn't forget that they'll have paid two or three shillings for their seats, and that it's their opinions which will count in the management's eyes."

He deliberated several minutes, then said with decision:

"Do you know what you're going to do, little girl? You're going to dance in your factory outfit. Just so, with a linen blouse, nice and white, the sleeves rolled back to the elbows, and without a hat."

Lizzie looked at him with horror, appeared to submit slowly, and said in a trembling voice:

"And the skirt?"

Her uncle had a moment's hesitation.

"Ah! the skirt!" he said. "We must see."

He scratched his head meditatively, and reflected:

"The skirt," he resumed, "hasn't much importance. Any short skirt that's not too bad will do. All that's necessary is for it to be short enough not to bother you, and to show up your footwork."

As Lizzie did not appear convinced, he continued persuasively: "You see, little girl, what you want to put on is something distinguished. Not a negro dance number, with spangled dresses, wriggles and screams. No, nothing but

the platform, the orchestra, and you. You've got talent, and I've shown you the best I could."

Her uncle seemed to struggle with his vocabulary. Filled with a great desire to express his thought, he struck a lyric strain and became solemn.

"It's not every one who can understand dancing like that, little girl! But it's better, it's decent, and it's distinguished. In the first place, if it was a matter of cutting monkey-tricks on the stage, you couldn't do it. It's not in the family. Instead of that, you're going to show them what you can do: proper, pretty work, and so much the worse for those who'll see nothing in it. But you mustn't forget one thing, little girl! It's this, that if you want to have the two pounds, and perhaps something along with it, you must show them some real dancing, and not monkey-tricks!"

Lizzie nodded her head, serious. She had understood. But these counsels were superfluous. She had a mission, and it was certainly not to make faces and cut

capers. Her uncle himself considered Saturday's test only as a happy opportunity by which they must try to profit. Lizzie knew better. After Saturday, everything was going to change, the clock of time was going to stand still a second and to start again, gaily, to mark the happy cadence of the new days. It was an authentic miracle, revealed to her alone, which came secretly and which must be rejoiced over in hiding: the realization of a promise made long, long ago to a good little girl who had patiently waited.

This was the impression which still dominated her when she made her appearance on the stage of the "Paragon": the confused sentiment that she had waited all her life, through interminable years, and that the means had at length come. She had no doubt as to the result: during a quarter of an hour spent in the wings she had seen pass on the boards a dozen competitors whose plaintively snuffled love-songs or flat

monologues had aroused only a far from flattering hilarity or impatient murmurs. There had been but one success, a carpenter who juggled with his tools, but Lizzie was not afraid.

When her turn had arrived, she waited until an assistant in tinselled uniform had dragged her platform to the middle of the stage. Then she came on, dignified and business-like, with rapid steps, looked to see that the board box was perfectly placed, and mounted upon it. She then perceived that her entry had been greeted by a great clamour—a clamour born somewhere at the back of the cavernous hall, which came to cross the footlights in an avalanche of sound.

All her friends of the rope-walk were above, in the six-penny gallery. The bar was deserted. Those who had been unable to find seats, clustered about the balustrades, and they cried at the top of their lungs: "Lizzie! Oh, Lizzie! Hurray!" The spectators in other seats began to cry also: "Lizzie, Oh, Lizzie!" amid laughter. The astonished orchestra did

not yet begin to play. Lizzie remained motionless on the platform, impatient, almost angry; but the occasion was so so solemn that she could not refuse to contain herself and wait a little longer.

Perhaps it was the fragility of her silhouette, of the slender body, alone in the middle of the stage; perhaps the naïve humility of the costume, of the short flowered skirt, of the poor bodice with turned-up sleeves; or still again the childish simplicity of her white face under the light locks, her solemn air of waiting . . . but there was something about Lizzie, always motionless, rigid and dignified under the familiar calls, that was strangely pathetic.

The orchestra started a dance, and the audience, amused and sympathetic, became quite silent when it saw that the little doll had begun to dance.

She danced with care, following exactly the cadence, a little annoyed because the orchestra played too loudly to suit her, and she was afraid of not being heard.

Before her, there was a vast hall, almost filled, innumerable rows of seats occupied by spectators, men and women, who were silent. All this was exactly as she had imagined it. After the first bars, her sight became clouded, and she no longer saw before her anything but a great yawning space peopled with attentive faces, towards which the light tapping of her feet on the boards went as a poignant appeal.

There was a difficult, very lively, passage, and the desperate fear of falling behind the music filled her with a feverish agony; but after that, it was a full, easy rhythm, a song clear, light, joyous, which carried her along utterly. She wanted to hold out her hands, to offer her open palms, to let herself sway with the measure, to sing with her whole body the hymn of desire and of glee. How could she make all these people who listened, understand? But Uncle Jim's words came back to her: "Above all, little girl, no monkey-tricks!" And she let her arms fall back to her sides.

She must, however, make herself heard, and she strove to introduce into her dance all that she had been forbidden to express otherwise. A quick, light cadence she turned into a naïve *hallelujah*, the delirious psalm of a little creature young and intoxicated with the sunshine; and when the rhythm slowed down again, languished, dragged a trifle, she raised her childish eyes to the yawning hall and narrated, with a hesitant, monotonous tapping, her short colorless life—long with weariness—her discouraged hope, the dream still ill-defined, obscure and frail.

And it was finished! She heard the last bar arrive with a wild surprise, clacked her heels very loudly the last times, as an appeal, a protest—it was too short; she could not be judged by it; it was so important for her; she should have . . . and the orchestra was silent, the hall abandoned its immobility, was suddenly filled with various movements and with a great confused noise. Lizzie, forgetting the gracious curtsey she had

planned, descended from the platform and entered the wings, a little giddy, her heart in her mouth, calling upon the gods to witness that it was too short and that she could do much better.

A big gentlemen stopped her by the wrist and, without letting go, advanced two steps and listened. She listened, too, and said to herself that many people were applauding, but that they did not seem to be clapping very loudly. A woman's voice, shrill as a whistle, rose above the uproar:

"Lizzie! . . . Lizzie! . . . Encore!"

The big gentleman turned round, nodded with a paternal air, and said:

"It's a success, little girl, a real success!"

And the American woman-juggler showed her dazzling teeth in a protecting smile.

Afterwards? Well, afterwards there was the deliberation of the jury, the proclamation of the result, hailed by new cries of enthusiasm from the gallery; and Lizzie was led to the middle of the

stage to be handed two new sovereigns in a little blue plush purse. Later, there were all the friends who waited at the door, overflowing with a hitherto unsuspected affection and with very shrill congratulations; and there was Uncle Jim, smiling and superior, who asked to see the sovereigns and, distrustful, rang them on the pavement.

But, in the midst of all this, Lizzie could not rid herself of an inexplicable agony and she repeated softly, the length of Mile End Road, that it was too short and that it could not count. What? It was already finished? The familiar faces, the well-known voices, the daily scene—nothing was changed in all that. Everything was as before, and there Faith Street opened before her anew, narrow and sombre, gathering between its soiled walls the stifling evening air, all its poor smells, and the sadness of the night.

When Lizzie awoke, she was suddenly conscious of the great calm which reigned

at once in the house and out of doors. The silence of the street was troubled only by vague domestic noises and the distant echo of a lazy voice. She rubbed her eyes, murmured: "Sunday," and buried her head again in her pillow. A little later, she reopened her eyes, without stirring, and all that had happened the evening before came back to her in successive images. She remembered the two sovereigns she had confided to Uncle Jim for greater safety, and the size of the sum warmed her heart. Reflecting, she said to herself that the trouble she had taken was surely worth that much; and, several moments later, she found herself sitting up in her bed, her chin on her knees, trembling with indignation. For two pounds, forty shillings, two little pieces of gold, which would not be of the slightest use to her, she had sold her future! That was what she had done. She had perfected herself in an accomplishment through labour and perseverance. She had acquired a talent—a rare talent, which had cost her long

efforts—and consequently much value. A great hope—the hope of better days, of a different life, of the revenge which must come sooner or later—had penetrated her, accompanied her everywhere and always, had made her support the injustice of men and of fate, the long hours in the factory, the shoes with their holes, the rancid margarine, the featherless hats, and many other things; and then the events had followed their course, the day of the apotheosis had come and now everything was finished! Of all that her just hope had promised her, there remained only a blue plush purse which held two sovereigns. Nothing was changed. Life was going to go on as before, with this difference, that she no longer had anything to expect.

She did not clearly understand what had happened. She did not know whom to blame; but there was a dishonesty somewhere, a theft; and, inasmuch as what had been filched from her was her due, her only belonging and the essence of her life, the injustice was so crying,

the theft so cruel, that a just God should never have tolerated them.

Lizzie told herself all these things, seated on her bed, her arms around her bended knees, and a crisis of impotent anger against the iniquity of men brought the tears to her eyes. The past being full of melancholy and the present uncertain, she tried to console herself by imagining once again the future under dazzling colours; but, after a brief effort, her poor courage crumbled, and the idea of the long years to come shook her with a shudder of horror. They presented themselves as a long gray warp, woven of toil and of weariness, where the interminable succession of the days traced the same monotonous design. She could imagine very exactly what the future would be, because it would be absolutely like the past. Only, in the past, there was, at the end of long dismal days, the consoling light of a promise—the promise of all the things which had not arrived . . . Lizzie remembered having read in a book printed in big letters, for little

children, the story of a fairy who walked "in the midst of a golden cloud." She felt a sort of bitter vanity in thinking that she, too, had walked in a golden cloud, dazzled and blinded; and, of the beautiful cloud, there remained but two derisive fragments, enclosed in a blue plush purse.

In the midst of her despair, the idea came to her that there was, as always on Sunday, the Middlesex Street market, several minutes away from her home, and that the two sovereigns, so despised, might, after all, judiciously employed, do a great many things. She arose, made her toilette with the greatest care, and descended. Her mother remarked to her that, when one got up at such an hour, it was absolutely useless to hope to find anything to eat. Lizzie smiled haughtily, and went to sit on the door-step to await her uncle. He arrived soon and, at her request, handed her the treasure with an indulgent smile.

Walking down Mile End Road, Lizzie thought that the pettiness of the price in which her dream was condensed, was

something astonishing, almost tragic. She held there, in her closed palm, all that remained of a world of mirage, slowly erected and dissipated in an evening. These two pieces of gold were, in a certain sense, relics, all that remained to prove to others, and to recall to herself, the existence of the fine edifice destroyed.

When she reached Middlesex Street, she remembered suddenly that she had as yet eaten nothing, and she breakfasted then and there on a portion of jellied eel, two ice-creams, and a cake of chocolate. Then she let herself be carried along by the crowd and followed the street to the end, looking at the shop windows.

She was still perplexed, when a sudden push drove her towards a corner of the pavement where pairs of shoes stood in rows. To tell the truth, she would have preferred to keep her money for less useful objects; but the voice of reason made itself heard, and she bought a pair of yellow shoes slightly worn, but

ravishingly pointed. Refusing the offer of a newspaper to wrap them in, she went and sat down on the pavement in a little side street, put on the yellow shoes and abandoned the old ones. Having done so, she decided that, since she had just been practical and provident, the next purchase would be an article of adornment. After a long hesitation, she decided on a fur. It was August, but the merchant dissipated her last doubts by assuring her that really fine furs were worn all the year round. She also bought a pearl necklace, a brooch, a pink velvet bow with which she adorned her hat, and a saffron silk handkerchief with her initial embroidered in blue. After this, she really could no longer feel sorry for herself, and her principal concern was to dispose these various ornaments with sufficient art for them all to be seen at the first glance.

This done, she went back up Whitechapel Road as far as the "Pavilion," then retraced her steps, walking slowly in the middle of the pavement, but striving

not to reveal a vulgar pride in her bearing. By the time she had reached her starting-point, she understood that, in this quarter, her toilette could not really be appreciated. Since, for once, she happened to be well dressed, she would go and show herself in more elegant spheres; and, without waiting longer, she lifted high her skirt, took the corner of her fur between her teeth so as not to lose it, and caught an omnibus in three strides. As it was not the moment to consider the cost, she bought a three-penny ticket, reserving the right to descend when she liked. She hesitated several times and half rose, but restrained herself and left the omnibus only when the conductor wearily announced: "Marble Arch."

Lizzie, on the pavement, regarded the railing and said "Hyde Park!" in a low voice charged with respect. Then she dusted her fur with tender little taps, took the saffron silk handkerchief in her hand, and entered high society with a natural air.

It is good to walk in the streets and look at the shop windows. It is sweet to eat a raspberry ice slowly; sweet also to lie late abed Sunday morning, or else to go in a carriage as far as Epping Forest and rest one's eyes on really green grass and on trees not planted in rows; but to stroll slowly along the paths of a park when the sun is shining, and when one has a new fur, yellow shoes, a pearl necklace and an embroidered silk handkerchief, is more delicious than all the rest. It is a joy so complete and so pure that every satisfaction of petty vanity ends by disappearing. One seems to have emerged from the hard shell of working days, to be installed in a superior circle where dazzling toilettes, the well-groomed setting, and polished manners render life sweet, easy and beautiful; and, through sympathy, the most ordinary gestures and even the natural course of ideas assume a mysterious distinction.

So Lizzie walked in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens as long as daylight

lasted, and was perfectly happy. At the end of the day she went towards the band-stand and sat at some distance from it to enjoy her last hours. The sun sank behind the distant trees, edged some scattered clouds with softly dazzling tints, then disappeared entirely. In the midst of the dusk which fell upon the park, the band continued to be heard playing military airs, with a gay, martial rhythm, to which the slow approach of twilight lent an unexpected melancholy.

Lizzie remained without stirring in her armchair, resolved not to leave before the last possible moment, yet feeling that her happiness was ebbing from her. It was too dark now for people to see her fur, the pink bow on her hat, or the silk handkerchief which, however, she kept half spread on her knees. The dusk thrust her pitilessly back into her sphere. She was no longer anything but an insignificant little thing, lost in the night.

When the music ceased, people rose from their seats and passed in front of

her on their way out; there were, above all, ladies—ladies with soft, swaying gait, whose silhouette, divined in the dark, appeared refined and elegant. They were fine ladies, surely, whether or not they bore titles. The luxurious indolence of their slightest gestures said to onlookers: "Now we are going home to our houses where there are soft lights, four-post beds and silver services."

Lizzie remembered the evening when Uncle Jim had awaked her high desire by speaking of duchesses who never would have known how to dance. Well, she knew how to dance as the fine ladies would never have been able to, never; but little they cared! They had not even come to the "Paragon" to see her win first prize; and, had they come, they would have forgotten it in less than an hour, returning to their pleasures, to their pretty things and to their pretty lives, while little Lizzie went back to the dark regions, with her two sovereigns and, within her, something broken which cried out its pain. The money was

already partly spent. It had given her several hours of satisfaction, and here it was already finished, while the other voice within her began again its mournful clamour, reminded her relentlessly of her despair, seemed to drive her on towards some dread asylum.

She, too, arose and went towards the gate. She no longer sought to look distinguished. In the first place, she felt she was not even well dressed. The other women wore no furs, and probably, if they had seen hers, before it was dark, they would have laughed. They would have laughed softly, without bursts, through politeness, and they would have passed on, with swaying bodies in their silken skirts, towards the carriages which certainly awaited them a little farther along. A great thing to know how to dance! It was less difficult than being rich, less witty than wearing rich costumes and doing nothing!

In the sombre paths of the park and later, on the omnibus which took her back to Mile End, Lizzie felt a strange

pride arise in the midst of her anxiety—the pride of those who have nourished great dreams and have not been understood. There would be a sort of bitter nobility to bear about in Faith Street, even in the rope-walk—the consciousness of unrecognized aspirations. She now felt herself delivered from petty obligations and vulgar duties, called to walk in ways strewn with laurels and briars, where go the great souls whom life has treated unjustly.

This pride fell somewhat when she reached the house, where the rest of the family were assembled. On the table was a pot of beer with glasses. Even Bunny had a little beer by him in the bottom of a goblet, and was eating nuts diligently. Blakeston saw the new adornments at the first glance, and frowned, but Uncle Jim admired sincerely:

"It's astonishing," he said, "the difference a little dressing makes all of a sudden in a girl!"

Lizzie kept a tragic silence, and Bunny,

divining her sadness, offered her some nuts.

Her uncle pursued placidly:

"Oh, well! Folks have a good time when they can, and then to work on Monday! So, little girl?"

The "little girl," with pinched lips, took off her hat, put down her fur; then, suddenly giving way, let herself go on the table and, her head between her arms, sobbed wildly. The nuts, slipping from her hand, bounded from the table and rolled along the floor, where Bunny picked them up.

In the midst of the stupefied silence, Lizzie's tearful voice pronounced pitifully:

"I don't want to! Oh, I don't want to!"

Her uncle, who still did not understand, asked slowly:

"What doesn't she want?"

Between two desperate sobs, she replied weakly:

"To work. Oh, I don't want to!"

Hearing this shameless pretention,

Blakeston wanted to protest indignantly, but her uncle stopped him with his hand.

He sought laboriously for something to say, and found nothing. Mrs. Blakeston, who did not take a girl's nerves too seriously, examined the fur with interest. After a little while, Uncle Jim, having definitely recognized his powerlessness to find words of consolation, offered her some beer. Then, seeing that this subterfuge did not suffice to stop the tears, he advised her to go to bed.

She climbed the stairs, still sobbing, and wept a long time on her pillow. Life was too hard. The way of great souls was all briars, without any laurels; and even the forgetfulness of sleep was no comfort for her, because of the morrow which was already coming.

At quarter past five, Lizzie rose, descended to light the oil range and fill the kettle, then went up again to dress. Beside her bed there was a bit of mirror, hung on a nail. When she did her hair

before it, she noticed that her eyes were red, and said aloud: "I don't care!" Studying herself more attentively, she discovered something else—that she would never be able to look like a heroine—any sort of heroine.

The heroines of vice and crime, the rebels, had a haughty mien, deep eyes with a dominating look, a dead-white complexion, carmine lips, an arrogant carriage of the head, enchanting and cruel. She, Lizzie, had none of these things. As a virtuous, innocent, persecuted heroine, she would have been more acceptable; but such heroines always had an air of chaste distinction, of dazzling virtue which marked them for inevitable triumph at the end. What she saw in the broken mirror was, without possible illusion, the face of a tired, troubled little girl, who was getting ready to work all day, for eight shillings a week, and did not like it. There was, then, no hope for her! When she had reached this conclusion, she perceived that she had now just enough time to

drink her tea hastily and to snatch a bit of bread to eat on the way.

She was nibbling as she reached Mile End Road, and the glory of the sun rising above the houses struck her as an insult. She said to herself: "The fine ladies are still in bed!" and looked hostilely at the rosy sky. The fact that she had risen in time to see the dawn was the bitter proof of her servitude. But it was only when she found herself once more at her accustomed place in the workshop, harnessed anew to the long, irksome task, that she tasted to the full the horror of the life which was beginning again.

It was quite possible that, in twenty-five years, she would still be there. Twenty-five years! She tried to count how many days that made, but soon abandoned the calculation, having arrived at figures so great that they ceased to have any meaning. The continuous whir of the machines seemed the very symbol of eternity. They worked smoothly, tirelessly, rapidly, exempt from the imper-

fections and weaknesses of a precarious humanity, and all these things which revolved without stopping—the fly-wheels, the long steel shafts, the belts and the gears—were lives, lives, lives which passed. They followed each other in long, inexhaustible files, performed several rapid revolutions, wore out and entered the void, replaced by others, all resigned and docile. Innumerable generations succeeded each other without complaining, and already the machine called, with its soft purring, the little girls who had thought to escape it.

The luncheon hour brought all her friends, who demanded a detailed account of everything that had happened, what the manager of the "Paragon" had said, and how she was going to spend the two sovereigns; but Lizzie was not in a humour to talk. The curiosity of these pretended friends appeared to her stupid and vulgar, and their various exclamations, all of which came to: "Hasn't Lizzie the luck!" shocked her like inappropriate remarks at a funeral. For

she bore to the earth that day a great secret full of pride, something like the remains of a person of high birth who had lived in exile, and whose name, even after her death, it was forbidden to reveal. These other girls did not understand. They would never understand, and they annoyed her. Naturally, when she showed her bad humour, she was accused of ridiculous vanity, and her comrades cut short their congratulations to say, in a mocking tone:

"Ah, it seems hard to go to work again when you've been on the stage! You'll have to get used to it, however, Liz!"

Lizzie replied:

"Perhaps!"

And she was the first to enter the factory.

The machines kept on whirring. It seemed as if they must continue thus for centuries and centuries, and as if all the generations to come would scarcely suffice to accomplish their task; but Lizzie was no longer in a state of resig-

nation. A fever of revolt panted in her, making her hands tremble, and all her frail will was up in arms against fate. What excited her most of all was the inequality of the struggle. On one side there was a great, irresistible and perhaps just law which, since the beginning of the world, bent those who were resigned, and those who were refractory, under the same yoke; and, on the other side, there was little Lizzie who opposed herself to the inevitable and aspired to escape the common lot. Yet, she would have to yield sooner or later, unless . . . She stopped a moment in her work, looking open-eyed at the wall; and something great and solemn entered the long hall filled with dust, veiled the mean setting, covered all the noises of common life, and whispered in her ear promises of escape.

She thought: "How simple it is!" and was astonished not to have thought of it sooner. It was a revenge, the only one possible, but dazzling; a defiance launched against all the great powers of

oppression; a tragic, beautiful end which would fittingly close a great grief . . . and she had read in the papers that there was almost no pain. The fine ladies themselves, if they learned of it, would be forced to respect. Her friends in the rope-walk would perceive confusedly that they had hidden among them a higher, purer soul; and when the knell of her departure sounded, somewhere in the infinite a just and compassionate voice would announce:

"She who is leaving us is little Lizzie, who knew how to dance!"

Once the idea had come to her, she did not even dream that there could be the least hesitation. It was the glorious, simple solution, which met every requirement, and for which she needed no one's permission. And she would be a heroine, after all!

The hours which passed after that were sweet and easy, and the slightest things assumed a mysterious meaning, as if ennobled by the reflection of what was to come. When the day's work was

done, Lizzie left the factory with a pleasant smile, and followed Commercial Road towards the docks, a little excited, but full of pride. She felt she was going to accomplish something great and heroic there, which must raise her forever to the rank from which she believed for a moment she had fallen, and put a seal of authentic nobility on her abortive efforts, People would say: "She must really have had a nature above the ordinary, since she died because she had not been recognized!" And death would thus give her her aureole more easily and more surely than success.

She had walked fairly quickly and perceived that it was still too soon. Night was only beginning. The river would be covered with barges and steamers. She might be disturbed, and she desired to finish without haste, gently, in an august frame of peace and of silence. So she walked along the streets, looking about her, with curiosity. Everything she saw—people, houses and shops—was ugly—ugly without distinction. There was

nothing worth a regret in all that. Besides—she understood it now—even the West End houses with their columned fronts, the quiet, distinguished squares, the shops with thick rugs, and even jewels and furs, could not have satisfied her entirely. She said this without envy and without spite, and she was proving it, since she was about to renounce for ever the hope of all these things, which no one could have taken from her.

When the night was a little farther advanced, she again took the direction of the river, skirted Limehouse church, and followed the dark streets, seeking the spot she had in view. She soon found it. It was a narrow passage between two walls which led to a section of quay. On both sides, the water of the river lapped softly against the high walls of the deserted wharves. From the quay, a foot-bridge led to a pontoon anchored in the current, to which steamers moored.

At the corner of the quay there was a public-house whose windows were still lighted. When she was sure there was

no longer anyone without, she passed quickly and noiselessly, and crossed the foot-bridge.

The water was perfectly calm, yet the pontoon swayed gently with a lazy motion, as if rocked by the wake of something which had just passed. On the other side, there was the double security of the black water and of the sombre walls of the warehouses. Here and there the lights of several motionless steamers cast their long, quivering reflections on the river. The distant whistling of a tug muffled by the night. Various noises from the city arriving at intervals in confused echoes. And that was all. This pontoon which swayed gently on the dark water had the air of a haven, and its profound solitude seemed, indeed, a promise of final peace.

Lizzie reached it running, saw the lights glimmering in the water, almost under her feet, and stopped. She knew that, at the left, very far away, was the sea, and, on the other side, London, and she was glad to see the tide was ebbing.

She thought what a vast and mysterious thing was a river which traversed the cities of men from one end to the other, pursuing, in their midst, its own life, which nothing had been able to change. How many of those things such as little Lizzie was about to become, had it already borne on its troubled waters and rolled on its mud-flats? Poor girls who had been driven to the last refuge because they had believed that honour and love were important things. Old people who had lived too long and too harshly, and did not feel strong enough to wait any longer. Bankrupt, vanquished, forsaken, they had come to it, and they had found what they sought, as she was going to find it in her turn.

She took two steps towards the edge and stopped again. Lizzie was not afraid of death. Only . . . she was terribly afraid of the black water, and she drew back slowly to the middle of the pontoon and strove to recall her great sorrow so as to arouse herself a little.

It came suddenly, with its train of

disillusionments, of iniquities and of intolerable vexations. Of all those women who had sought an asylum in the deep water, there was, surely, not one who could have had as sound reasons as Lizzie! What was it to have been betrayed or abandoned! Not to have had enough to eat! She! Her hope had been stolen from her; occult, maleficent powers had suggested to her an obscure dream, had nourished it, fanned it, made it grow from day to day, only to filch it suddenly from her in a cruelly incomprehensible fashion! There remained now nothing but a great distress, the vague, interminable future, the irksome toil . . . And the two sovereigns were already spent!

When she had thought of all this, Lizzie covered her eyes with her hands, walked straight before her, felt the ground fail beneath her feet, and let herself go with a shiver . . .

On the first floor of the house in Faith Street, the family council was assembled.

Mr. Blakeston looked at his brother-in-law's watch, and said bitterly:

"That's what happens when you leave these children their money! They pass their evenings out of doors spending it like fools!"

His wife added:

"And what fine ideas! You saw the fuss she made last night, saying she didn't want to work any more!"

Uncle Jim interposed benevolently:

"Bah!" he said. "At her age, they say that, and then next day think no more of it. You mustn't complain, all told; everything has ended well."

Everything had, indeed, ended well, especially for Lizzie, whom the ebbing tide urged gently to the ocean.

Date Due			
D 19'45			
OCT 15'58			
MR 15'90			
MR 29'90			
AP 12'90			
AP 26'90			

848
H37ma Hémon, Louis
tB7 My fair lady.

DATE	ISSUED TO
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